

Ly. Blair

ARGUS;

THE HOUSE-DOG AT EADLIP.

MEMOIRS

IN A FAMILY CORRESPONDENCE,

BY THE AUTHOR OF CONSTANCE AND
THE PHAROS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

Ai gran delitti

E' compagno il timor. L' alma ripiena

Tutta della sua colpa

Teme se stessa.

METASTASIO.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. HOOKHAM, NEW BOND-STREET.

MDCCLXXXIX.

ARGUS

THE HOUSE-DOG AT EADIE

MEMOIRS

TAMMY CORRESPONDENT

THE HOUSE-DOG AT EADIE



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M.DCCCXXXIX.

ARGUS, &c.

LETTER LXXXI.

MRS. THIRPLEY TO MISS BELVEDERE.

Norwich, 6th July, 1787.

WHAT I feel in sitting down to write to you, my dearest Gertrude (for you have laid your commands on me still to use that fond appellative) I cannot describe, nor would I have you conceive, lest you imagine the effort painful. It is no otherwise so, than as it reminds me that I have lost you, and inforces on my mind that cruel conviction, that you are not, as I had almost taught myself to think you, my child.

You cannot *suppose* you shall be more at a loss without me, than I absolutely *find* myself without you. Notwithstanding my change of

place, my mind retains its care for you; and from the time of my rising till I go to bed, I am perpetually blundering about Miss Belvedere. I have a little niece of Mr. Thirpley's with me, and I so often call her Gertrude, that the poor thing desires me not to take the trouble of correcting myself. She says, Gertrude is a very pretty name, and she is sure it belongs to somebody I love very much. At night, before I go to my chamber, I cannot forbear asking myself if I have been into your's, to see you safe and well, and asleep. I postpone doing many trifling things till I meet you, imagining you will presently come into the room, and I seem always expecting you. If I find any thing in reading that I think you will like, or will inform you, I put a paper into the book; and one day when Mr. Thirpley saw me do this, and asked me what it was that I so particularly noticed, though his presence should have set me right, I very gravely replied, that I saved the page for Miss Belvedere.

But do not, my dear, infer from this, that I am less happy than you wish me. While I hear of your welfare, I want, thank Heaven, no addition to my state of enjoyment; for my present pleasures, and those I miss, are incompatible; and I will not scruple to say, will bear no comparison,

parison. This confession I am bound, as well in gratitude as in sincerity, to make, since it is to Mr. Belvedere, that Mr. Thirpley and I owe the ability of living together in such comfort.

We have in our parish a very agreeable neighbourhood, and I assure you are capable of mustering a conversation-party that would not disgrace any of your polite circles. Our nearest neighbours are Mr. and Mrs. Parpen, two people equally deserving of respect for their moral qualities, and of regard, for their intellectual information; and who, with Mrs. Parpen's brother, have lately spent some time at Mr. Burlew's, in Kent, where they met your illustrious and intimate friends, lord and lady Porthurst, and their daughter.

Had I *told* you this, I know your next questions would have been—Well, and how did they like my illustrious friends?—What did they think of lady Helen?—Were they not charmed with her?—I will not wait for your putting these interrogatories, because I really wish you to have their opinion; and it is necessary that you, who are so inclined to think well of all the world, should embrace all opportunities of knowing those you form connections with. Credulity is, I confess, the offspring of simplicity, and simplicity is the child of innocence;

cence; but credulity is likewise the parent of error, and the progeny of error can neither be traced nor enumerated. Were we to live in a world of purity, no evil could result from implicit confidence or unsuspecting benevolence; but as we are placed in "a motley mass of contradictions strong," and as not so much what *we are*, as what we *appear to be*, directs the multitude in the opinion they form of us, it behoves us, on all points, to judge before we determine; and on none is it more proper than in the important business of selecting friends.

Do not imagine, my dearest Gertrude, that I would prohibit your attaching yourself where your affections direct you, or that I am jealous of your having found, in my stead, such a depository of your confidence as is necessary to your happiness. I know by observation, that you cannot live without an alliance of this kind: your love is like the vine, or the ivy, which must have something to adhere to, or wander in unsatisfied luxuriance. It is this necessity of adhesion, and the consequent desire of it, that leads you to approve universally. A profession of regard for you will, at any time, engage your belief, and attract you as the trunk of any tree will encourage the vine or the ivy to close contact. On this subject permit me to say a little

little that will not, perhaps, be very pleasing to you.

Your connexion with lord Porthurst's family is nearer, if possible, than friendship. It is an hereditary union; and while you live, I would have you regard it as sacred. The great affection and attention they have shewn you, call for your gratitude; and the discharge of every duty you owe them, as persons who have ever manifested the disposition of parents towards you, is made easy and pleasant to you, by your voluntary regard for, and esteem of them. Lady Helen Storford is an agreeable and honorable acquaintance for you; but as to the matter of *friendship* with her, I know not well what to say.—You will stare at my doubt—you will think it impossible that your dear lady Helen and you should *not* be friends—and you may possibly think me splenetic or absurd, when you see my definition of your connexion with her.

Lord Porthurst and Mr. Belvedere have been friends of a long standing, and his lordship's thorough good-nature extends that friendship in a particular manner to his friend's daughter. Lady Porthurst's affections follow her husband's; for, without offence to the countess, I do not think she has discernment enough to have selected you, without an index to direct her; and

from the manner in which she has educated her daughter, I do not see a probability of the young lady's inheriting the steady social affection that so strongly marks the character of her father. Lady Helen will like you, because all the world will like you. You will be a very convenient, if not necessary, friend to her; but for friendship, unless I am very much deceived, she has as many of the requisites as I have for the post of master-general of the ordnance, or first lord of the admiralty. Till I shew you the authority on which I speak, you may very properly question my judgment, who know so much less than you do of lady Helen.

Mrs. Parpen tells me that she, her husband, and brother, who are both men of considerable attainments, and have seen much of the world, were invited by Mr. Burlew, under an apprehension that he alone could not make his house sufficiently agreeable to his titled relations, who it seems had no great claim to his kindness, having causelessly, and for a long time, almost wholly neglected him. He, however, was willing to be pleased with their offer of a visit, though the then infirm situation of his health rendered it rather a troublesome honour. The weather proving rainy, the beauty of a very fine country was eclipsed, and many persons
who

who would have visited him, were prevented by it. The disgust of the peer, and his family, when they found what they must take up with, I will not say *could* not be concealed; they took no pains to conceal it: and this, added to the insolence and extravagance of the many useless servants they brought with them, if it had not been of short duration, would have proved intolerable. In this situation were affairs there, when Mr. and Mrs. Parpen were called away by the dangerous illness of one of their children; and not even Mr. Burlew's request could prevail on her brother to remain in the house to witness lord Porthurst's provoking *nonchalance*, and to see the countess and her daughter, while making the utmost pretensions to high breeding, often studiously affronting.

And now, before I give you Mrs. Parpen's opinion of lady Helen, and to give that opinion credit with you, it is necessary you should be a little acquainted with Mrs. Parpen herself, of whom, if you receive your judgment from your right honorable friend, I guess you will not be very fond. She is a plain woman, with an improved understanding. She has accomplishments enough to set up a dozen modern young ladies, and more knowledge than she chuses to display to casual acquaintance. In

her moral character, she is serious, steady, respectable, and truly amiable; diffident, not from bashfulness but humility; disposed to every action of charity, friendship, or benevolence, and in every relative situation scrupulously conscientious; but Mrs. Parpen has nothing to commend her in her person or address; she would be more at a loss in a palace, than in an unfurnished cottage; and at a rout or assembly would be entirely overlooked. Such, as nearly as I can collect from my knowledge of her when she was a young woman, and the renewal of my acquaintance with her now, she is; and when you have read this character of her, you will judge for yourself what allowances are to be made for her errors of opinion.

She tells me that lady Helen Storfors's beauty, both of countenance and person, is such as would attract universal love and admiration, were they not constantly repelled by her affectation and conceitedness; that she has a great portion of vivacity, which, if good humored, would be highly agreeable; but that, soured as she was by the gloom of the country, it shewed itself only in poignant satire and taunting repartee. I asked what she thought of lady Helen's understanding and accomplishments. As to the former, she said she could but very imperfectly

imperfectly judge, for her ladyship's intellectual faculties seemed wholly regulated by fashion; her opinions veered to all points, and only seemed guided by a resolution to keep them diametrically opposed to those of the persons she conversed with. As to her accomplishments, not a word ought to be said, because I remember you told me, in one of your letters, that her ladyship was, in the language of the *beau-monde*, highly accomplished. But my Gertrude does not speak this language; and I will therefore venture to call in question the decree of this formidable judicature. That lady Helen has quick parts, but no application, I can testify on my knowledge of her: what then can her attainments be? I will tell you, pretty nearly, to what they amount. She danced with incomparable elegance before she went abroad: I will therefore, supposing she must have improved while in France, allow her uncommon excellence in this branch of education. She speaks French, Mrs. Parpen says, very fluently, though not very correctly. Italian she has a smattering of, but thinks it too great labor to learn it completely. For music she has no taste, beside what she picks up by hearsay; she has neither ear nor voice, though she criticises and sings; and were it not a fashionable accom-

B 5

plishment,

plishment, she would, I dare say, honestly confess her indifference to it. She told Mrs. Parpen, that next to a needle she hated a book; and consequently never reads. She has a little knack of rhyming, and now and then produces some such poetry as you meet with in the appendix to an almanack, or puzzles her acquaintance with her enigmas and *charades*. She writes a hand that would disgrace her chambermaid. As to her stile of composition, you, who are her correspondent, are the better judge.

That this fair lady is admired and caressed, apparently militates against my censure of her; but I have seen enough of the world to know, that, with all these imperfections, she may be an object of attention, and a favorite with people who look not for what is solid, but what is brilliant. Her rank, and her being an only daughter, are circumstances that make her conspicuous. Her beauty attracts observation, and is a favorable introduction. She is gay, lively, unembarrassed, totally free from *mauvaise honte*, and has all that *prontezza corretta* that Goldoni ascribes to the ladies of Paris. She *can* talk, and *will* talk, on all subjects; and where she would fail for want of information, judgment, or argumentative power, she succeeds by captivating

vating those she contends with.—So much for lady Helen Storford.

In the other friendship you are forming, you may, I hope, promise yourself that species of pleasure which the lightness of lady Helen's mind cannot afford you ; but here it is necessary that you exercise a considerable degree of circumspection, because the person you are attaching yourself to, is very nearly a stranger to you. In the case of lady Helen, no caution or enquiry was requisite ; her family, and the friendship subsisting between her father and your's, were sufficient credentials ; but of Mrs. Melros you only know, that her husband was, and her son is, a gentleman of worth and consideration. How far this kind of relative merit is to be relied on, is worth your thinking on.

Your temper, my dear Gertrude, is of that sort which " hopeth all things ;" and you have a keen eye in the discovery of what is good in those about you. Mrs. Melros is all that is amiable ; and in the next acquaintance you make, you will find something equally fascinating. Now, though I do not mean to insinuate that your judgment is false or ill-founded, yet from the manner of your expressing yourself, I fear, that in encouraging this extremely social disposition, and giving your friends credit for

so much excellence; you will meet with many mortifications. You have dressed up an image in your mind, which you suppose all those you love to resemble, and whenever you find out the dissimilarity, you will feel cruelly balked. Friendships should not be contracted under a persuasion that the object is possessed of every excellence, and for this reason—that we shall certainly find ourselves in an error. It is the inherent property of *love*, to present to a lover every possible perfection in his mistress; the delusion lasts, perhaps, long enough to bring the parties together; when it vanishes, if *esteem* (which, paradoxical as it seems, is not at all incompatible with a knowledge of every failing) succeeds, the persons are happy; if it does not, they are palled, disappointed, disgusted, and miserable. But *friendship*, the more rational affection of the soul, to be just and permanent, must be quick-sighted and impartial: it must, and it will, if attended to, present the object it means us to embrace, as it really and simply is. No deformity of person, no irregularity of features, no defect of intellect will it stoop to conceal; nor, where this knowledge is not to be obtained, will it ever *suppose* that moral impossibility, human perfection! its influence is exerted not to *hide* defects, but to *reconcile* us to them.

them. Virtue is its basis, happiness is its end—an end which deception can never reach, nor wilful credulity hope for. If we are in quest of perfect beauty, whether internal or external, to fall in love is the shortest way to delude ourselves into an opinion that we have found it.—If we apply to friendship, we must be contented to see things as they are.

This, my dearest Gertrude, is the sum total of my information on one point, and my observation on another. I wish you no otherwise to make use of my advice, than to restrain yourself from delegating to others a power over your mind. If in the end you find me wholly mistaken, you are no loser; as any caution you may hereafter think it prudent to exercise, will afford you time to investigate the character of your friends, and thereby strengthen the bond of union between you. I know you will think my maxims unpleasant: there is nothing more painful to ingenuous natures than the first awakening of suspicion; but many an amiable mind has been ruined by the want of a due mixture of caution, and many an one, who would have shuddered at an immoral action, has been made accessory to a crime, by indulging that mischievous and insidious foe—charitable credulity.

Though

Though I have ceased to have any authority over you, I am persuaded you will not call my care impertinent; and though you do not like my *subject*, you will, I am sure, acquit my *intentions*; and still believe me, as I very truly am, with the greatest respect for Mr. Belvedere, and sincerest love for yourself,

Your very zealous and anxious friend,

ANNE THIRPLEY.

LETTER LXXXII.

LADY HELEN STORFORD TO MISS BELVEDERE.

Vale Oster, 7th July.

AT last, my dear Bel, the grand secret is divulged, and I am intrusted with the cause of the quarrel between my father and my *grandissimo* uncle. It was, to be sure, under an injunction to secrecy that it was communicated to me; but I dare say I am not the only person that knows it. Your father, I will venture my head, has heard it all; for I do not believe lord P. ever had a thought that he concealed

ealed from him, so why should not I strike up
 this pretty confidential sort of friendship with
 his daughter? *Mon amie est moi meme*, and Bel-
 vedere shall be as wise as Helen. Verily, I
 cannot endure to have my mind burthened with
 what must be told to no one. I never kept a
 secret three days since I was created; two days
 and a night I have suffered it, "like a worm in
 "the bud," not "to feed on my damask cheek,"
 but to gnaw, gnaw, gnaw my tongue, till it
 has been intolerable, and then out I have bolted
 it to the first person I met. You see, therefore,
 it is much more prudent to leave me (and I
 believe it is so with all people) at liberty as to
 divulging what is told them. If you do not re-
 strain them, they will perhaps be so careful as
 to select a proper object for their confidence;
 but if you entirely prohibit the discovery, and
 they are as conscientious as I am, depend upon
 it that the very pain, the agony of keeping a
 secret, will force them to deliver it to the per-
 son nearest them. This I tell you, *mia bella*,
 by way of cautioning you never to trust me with
 a private affair. No, my dear, in pity to me,
 do not; I should be sorry to disoblige you, and
 I should involuntarily do it, even if I held my
 tongue, by starting whenever any body ap-
 proached me that I thought might steal the se-
 cret

cret from me, and by my hesitating, in answering the commonest questions in the world, lest I should inadvertently betray you.

Now to return to the subject I set out from. Money, money, money was the bone of contention between my two illustrious relations—money, the bane and basis of earthly bliss, the necessary ingredient and the alloy of pleasure, &c. &c. &c. It seems my father made the abominable Kentish visit with a view to prevail on *monsieur Gripefast* to arrange his affairs in such a manner as would fix the advantage my mother would derive from his death; or, in other words, lord Porthurst went to enquire what Mr. Burlew would leave him. The spirit not moving mine uncle to reveal his intentions, my father tried to persuade him to accommodate him with a sum of money, which one party could as well spare as the other spend; but this was refused; and a long lecture ensued about extravagance, squandering, dissipation, waste, and the Lord knows what, in which it seems I had my share of the old gentleman's rage, an obligation of which I hope to acquit myself by resolving, as I have most piously done, never again to enter his hovel door, nor abridge his splendid stile of living, by infringing on his roast beef or cherry pie.

All

All this intelligence I had in a letter from mama, who likewise tells me, she and lord P. have thoughts of going to Brussels for two years. I suppose they expect Mr. Burlew to die, or cool, in that time. She gives me my choice either to go with them, or to remain *under the care* of colonel and lady Lucy Branlyffe, with liberty to go where else I will, provided they allow me to consider their house as my home. As she says the Brussels scheme is to go *incog*. I do not much care for the trip, though I own I should like to see the place; but I must go like myself, or not at all; so I determine to accept the Vale Osier alternative. Branlyffe was out of his little wits when I pronounced my final resolution; Lucy hesitated; I stared; for she had just been hoping, when the letter came, that it was not a summons for me, and now she looked as if she hoped it *was*; but I soon found the cause: it would indeed be very inconvenient to them to have me always with them, much as they are from home; so I said I was sure you and Mr. Belvedere would, at any time, relieve them; and they then desired me to assure lady Porthurst of their acceptance of the honor, and so forth, of having lady Helen Storford under their care.

Behold

Behold me now, therefore, my dear, in the guardianship of a gay, young, handsome colonel, and a sprightly lass of my own rank, not many years older than myself. Oh if all parents would leave their children to such guardians, what a charming thing it would be to be a ward; but fathers and mothers generally pick out the old and the ugly, to take charge of us pretty creatures. As for me, so well am I pleased with my gaoler, that I think of nothing but that 'tis happy he is a married man; if he was not, by my cap and feathers, I believe he would be the mortal blest with me.

As I have no longer a right to be rebellious in this house, and as I do not think I shall quit it before lord and lady P. quit England, I must wait till my guardians *give me permission* to come to you. I hope you are not very solitary without me, for I see no prospect of my visiting Ashholm suddenly. Branlyffe is eternally rallying me about his new authority; and though I remind him that I am still at liberty to dispose of myself, he vows he will exercise the right of locking me up, as soon as I offer to decamp. Melros will spend a few weeks here in the autumn, and I think that will be a good opportunity for me to begin my attack on his weaker side. I must study his character a little previously,

ously, that I may lay siege properly; should he not surrender, 'tis only a small quantity of powder and shot thrown away. If I make him my captive, glory awaits me, for he is thought invulnerable. Still, however, believe me, I never shall be his, nor less than I am now,

Your

HELEN.

LETTER LXXXIII.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

Asbholm Park, 10th July.

WHEN I neglect the advice of so kind a friend as Mrs. Thirpley, may I want it and wish for it in vain. I cannot say, my dear madam, that I felt any more than *one* very agreeable sensation as I read your monitory letter; but that I would forego any pleasure to perpetuate: it arose from a thorough conviction that I have in you a benign and tutelar genius, who sees for me, feels for me, judges for me, and guides me. Thanks, abundant thanks for your love and anxiety: the caution you inculcate seemed, as I imbibed it, to contract my heart,
and

and give a shadowy tint to every object around me ; but when I more maturely considered how far it reached, and what must be its effect, I perceived that it might be no more grievous than the injunction of temperance to those who wish to preserve health. You would not, I am satisfied, prohibit or abridge my pleasures : it shall be my care to enjoy them with prudence and circumspection.

I grant many of your observations, and Mrs. Parpen's strictures on the character of lady Helen, are well founded ; but I believe all that is imputed to her as resulting from ill temper, is the consequence of levity, and an eager desire of amusement. She has been brought up in a trifling manner, and is made a trifler ; still, however, there is a warmth of affection, and an ingenuousness about her, that, unless she discards them, must always make her amiable.

Forgive me if I say you are mistaken in thinking I suppose perfection in my friends. If I err, it is in accepting a commutation for failings. I consider virtues as preponderating against faults, and, if my friend has the valuable advantage, I am satisfied ; but in the case of lady Helen, and indeed of lord and lady Porthurst, I have no option ; for were I cool in my regard for them, I must be ungrateful. Here, therefore,

therefore, gratitude justifies me in any degree of partiality, and as I intend never to put it in the power of any but a tried friend to make me in any way unhappy, you will, I trust, find the good effects of your advice.

Lady Helen writes me word, that lord and lady Porthurst are going for a couple of years to Brussels on a retrenching scheme, during which time colonel Branlyffe's house will be her regular home; and whenever that is inconvenient, she will be with us. She hints at it, and my father is not averse to it. The time for her paying her promised visit here, seems as far off as ever:—it is one of her ladyship's failings to be intirely engrossed with the scene before her. You see I am not blind to her faults.

My father is so immersed in business, and it is this summer so much the fashion with our neighbours to be any where but at home, that I should perhaps feel the want of society, were it not for Mrs. Melros, with whom I generally spend more than half of every day. No time passes so agreeably; she has such a various fund of elegant amusement, that she always seems a new companion, without the awkwardness and inconvenience of novelty. I have sent the piano forte to her house, for the pleasure of hearing her play, which she does so as to shame me.

me. She has had a very fine voice ; it has lost much of its power, but retains all its sweetness. I have heard her sing some of Arne's delightful airs, in a stile that has affected me beyond expression. She has read a great deal, and of a sort of reading out of the common track ; so that she is abundantly entertaining and instructive. There seems to me to be hardly any thing of which she is quite ignorant, which is the more to be wondered at, as she says her parents could give her little or no education, and till she was near sixteen she knew nothing but of the business of a farm house. Does not this seem very strange ? There is certainly, I will confess to you, some mystery annexed to her story. I cannot tempt her to be at all communicative. She sighs whenever she speaks of any event passed many years ago ; and from her present melancholy, and the hints she drops occasionally, I collect that she has been unfortunate. Of her husband, she makes little mention ; but always with great respect. You know he was in the army, and you remember he was killed in America. Her only comfort, she says, is her son, of whom she is very fond ; and his conduct, if I may judge from her opinion of him, is exemplary. She appears to me desirous of concealing the place of her birth, and what-

ever

ever can tend to discover who she yet I think she would let me into her den-
 dence, if somebody, or something, di-
 against her inclination, restrain her.

This mysteriousness is extremely unplea-
 to me, as beside keeping me constantly in fe-
 of saying or doing something that, while I can
 not tell whence her melancholy proceeds, may
 wound her mind, it makes me reserved in my
 conversation about her. My acquaintance,
 who see her in the carriage with me, or meet
 me walking with her, naturally enquire, when
 such a question is proper, who this stranger is,
 and two or three queries generally discover
 that I am more ignorant than on such an oc-
 casion I ought to be. She declines all visits
 and civilities, but from me; and, which you
 will wonder at, I cannot get her to come hither
 even for an hour. If I would see her, I must
 go to her, for the outside of our house is all she
 chuses to know of it. I should think that she
 would rather be excused from the trouble I give
 her, if her every expression did not manifest joy
 when I visit her. I can give you no idea of
 the attachment she discovers to me. I never
 saw a mother so fond of a daughter.

Suspicious as are the circumstances about
 Mrs. Melros, I should think myself ill repaid
 by

pleasure of her acquaintance for the
 run in forming a friendship with her,
 and not my father's sanction. I fancy he
 is better informed as to her situation and his-
 tory, than I am ; because, to all my expressions
 of wonder, he answers, that none who are not
 intimate with her, can esteem her as she de-
 serves ; that she has been cruelly treated by
 those who ought to have protected her ; that
 he has seen the worst side of the world, and
 learnt to despise it ;—and, when I ask for an ex-
 planation of these vague sentiments, which to
 me are scarcely more intelligible than her si-
 lence, he refers me to the death of her husband,
 and the loss of two children who died nearly at
 the same time. Surely, if this were all, Mrs.
 Melros herself would explain it. Be it as it
 may, I cannot much err while my father re-
 gulates my actions ; and I may innocently en-
 joy what would be one of the pleasantest con-
 nexions I could form, if it had but the addition
 of mutual confidence.

My father promises me, but without fixing
 a time for the performance of his promise, that
 he will one evening take a walk with me when
 I go to Mrs. Melros, and that I shall in-
 troduce him to her, as it is many years since
 they met ; but I cannot yet prevail upon him :
 business,

business, or the weariness of business, is the constant excuse; and I go, evening after evening, with no other companions than servants, and perhaps horses. He bids me, in my behaviour to her, be frank and unembarrassed, and not appear aware that she is not equally so to me; but to repress my curiosity is impossible. I feel so interested in her melancholy, that I long to know what causes it. I am sure it must be something very uncommon.

You will be angry with me for my folly, and scarcely accept me for

Your very humble servant,

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER LXXXIV.

MISS BELVEDERE TO LADY HELEN

STORFORD.

Aspholm-park, 15th July, 1787.

YOUR letter, my dear lady Helen, should not have remained so long unnoticed, but that my time has been very much taken up by the friend you accidentally introduced me to. Poor Mrs.

Mrs. Melros has been for some days extremely ill, though in no danger; and as her disorder affected her spirits, I made a point of doing what I could to amuse her. She is now recovering apace, and as she insists on my appropriating the whole of this day to my own affairs, I devote the earliest part to you.

You have flattered me into a hope that our house may share, with colonel Branlyffe's, the credit, for I must not call it the *honour*, of offering you a home, during lord and lady Porthurst's absence. My father authorizes me to express his sense of the distinction, by intreating you to consider Ashholm and Berkley-square as your abiding-places, whenever you please to visit them; and, for myself, I can promise that you shall find ever the very cordial reception I have so often enjoyed at your house. I cannot entertain you as elegantly, but I will as hospitably as any of your friends, even in Paris.

I do not feel quite comfortable in the idea of lord and lady Porthurst's going out of the kingdom without my paying my respects to them, and taking leave of them; but my father tells me their engagements will not admit of our meeting, and I must submit to a necessity which is very irksome to me.

I should

I should make an ill-founded claim to your pity, if I urged you to hasten to Ashholm on account of the loneliness of my situation. It is indeed far from lonely: perhaps the certainty that you will come, makes me less impatient. I am not unhappy without you; I shall be very happy with you. I please myself with thinking you will be pleased with Mrs. Melros—we shall have abundance of fine walks, fine rides, and agreeable conversation;—but what is all this to the vivid pleasures you are enjoying at Vale Osier? I, and all I can offer, must appear *sombre*, after the gaiety of colonel Branlyffe's villa. I must not intrude on your time by sple- netic prognostications, which, I hope, will never be fulfilled. I long to see you, and to tell you by word of mouth, how much I am, dear lady Helen,

Your sincerely affectionate

and very humble servant,

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER LXXXV.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

Askeholm-park, 15th July.

DEAR MADAM,

A SHORT letter, which I have just now written to lady Helen, is my first performance in the epistolary way since I wrote to you. In the afternoon of that day, I called on Mrs. Melros, and found her very much indisposed with a feverish complaint. She continued really very ill for three days, and then her disorder left her, but left her so low and weak, that it was very unfit for her to be in the care of common servants only. I have, therefore, spent every leisure hour, in which I could be absent from home, with her. To-day she sends me word she is much better, and insists on my making up for some of my *lost time*, as she calls it, by staying at home.

Her illness, and my attendance on her, have in some measure lessened her reserve: she has told me a few particulars of her life, and promised me, that at some time or other, I shall be made acquainted with her story. This promise has made me quite easy, as it shews she does

not

not wish to conceal what has befallen her in the course of her life, and that she thinks me deserving of her confidence. I can already behave with much more ease to her, and I feel that I love her every day more than the former one.

My father cannot enjoy much of the pleasure of the country, he is so much taken up with lord Porthurst's affairs, which, by what little I can learn, are in dreadful confusion. Though I am sorry he is engaged in so disagreeable a business as arranging them, I am glad, for lady Helen's sake, that they are in such hands; for what a distressing situation would she be in, if the arrangement of them were postponed till the earl's death! The family-estate never was large, nor, as we all know, were the present possessors ever œconomists: it has undergone a yearly diminution, and such as it is not likely speedily to recover. The labor of balancing accounts, and putting them in a train of payment, directing sales, and advising his lordship, falls on my father, whose time, that should be devoted to relaxation after the daily fatigue his active mind goes through in his own business, is wholly engrossed in reading deeds, making calculations, and writing letters on this perplexing subject.

Lord Porthurst and his lady leave England in a few weeks. They are at present at Trevelly, and will sail from the port nearest to them, so that I shall not see them, nor, I believe, will their daughter, before they go. Thank God, this is not my case: it would break my heart, to see a parent go into such an exile.

We are to have a large company to dinner to day. I must consult with *my prime minister* about my dessert, which I want to have a little out of the common way of elegance. You will therefore excuse me if I add only, that I am,

Yours most sincerely,

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER LXXXVI.

LADY HELEN STORFORD TO MISS BELVEDERE.

18th July.

I HAVE, by to-day's post, my sweet Belvedera, a letter from my mama, in which she says every thing is settled for their going; but that

that it is necessary lord P. should see Mr. Belvedere; and for that purpose he has written to him by the same post, to request your father to come down to Trevelly. Mama, therefore, desires me to leave Vale Osier, and go over to you; for, as she very justly observes, the least I can do for all the trouble Mr. Belvedere has about us, is to relieve his daughter's solitude in his absence. In this opinion, I assure you, I entirely acquiesce, and would set out instantly for Ashholm, but neither Branlyffe, nor his wife, will hear of it. They insist on my writing to you, and, in their name, inviting you to spend the time of Mr. Belvedere's journey, and stay in Cornwall, here. I am told not to press it with *common* vehemence, but with all the earnestness in my power, and I therefore (obedient to my colonel) conjure you, if you love me, to come hither. You will find it infinitely more agreeable than my coming to you, for we are very cheerful, and the vale is in all its beauty. Branlyffe says, if Mr. Belvedere cannot bring you, and does not chuse you should come alone, he will make a party to fetch you. At all events you must come; so contrive it as you please. Let me have your answer immediately, with an arrangement for your remove; or else in your proper person be here by this day seven-
 night,

night, at farthest. If you venture to put a negative on the proposition, never expect me again to stile myself

Your sincere friend,

HELEN.

LETTER LXXXVII.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

27th July, 1787.

WERE I to date my letter from the place of my present abode, I should astonish you. My dear madam, I am in a house I never saw till three days ago, and with persons, all excepting one, as much strangers to me. In short, I am at colonel Branlyffe's, at Vale Osier, in Kent, and here I am likely to be for a week or two. The cause of my sudden and extraordinary migration is this:—Lord Porthurst sent to my father, requesting to see him once more at Trevelly. Lady Porthurst wrote to her daughter, desiring her to be with me during my father's absence. Colonel and lady Lucy Branlyffe opposed this, and, instead of it,

were

were so very obliging as to send me a most pressing invitation to pass the time with lady Helen at their house. To complying with their desire, I had many objections; leaving dear Mrs. Melros was not the least; but my father said, he could not go easy if he left me at Ashholm, and that determined me. I was foolish enough to go in great tribulation to acquaint Mrs. Melros with this sad necessity, and she consoled me under it, by promising to devote her leisure to writing to me. She told me I might derive some advantage from my absence, for that a narrative of her life, which she was sure I wished for, should be the substance of her letters. This flattered me with a hope of being united to her in a still closer bond of friendship on my return to Ashholm, and I parted from her tolerably cheerful.

Three days abode in a house does not entitle one to judge of the inhabitants. Lady Helen had told me much of the gaiety she lived in here, and indeed I do not find her account exaggerated; but as for the real cheerfulness I meet with, unless noise, disorder, and all the racket of a town-residence is to be called cheerfulness, I cannot admit that there is any here. It is astonishing to me, that colonel Branlyffe should have taken a house in such a place. The country

try undoubtedly is beautiful, and in the most elegant manner rural ; but what is this to them ! They do not venture out of their chamber till noon. They then take a dusty ride, which they might enjoy just as well in Hyde-park. They return, dress, go out to dinner, or have dinner-company at home. The gentlemen sit by the bottle till nine or ten in the evening, and the ladies play at cards. If they walk, it is when it is so dark that nothing can be discerned, and in a place which has nothing to recommend it, but that it is crowded like the mall. Supper-company, a concert, or a ball, generally keeps them up till the most beautiful part of the morning, when they disperse to recruit for the next day ; and why all this could not be as well done in Marybone, or indeed in Cheapside, I cannot discover.

The house is new ; but not sufficiently modern to suit the taste of its master, who is making such improvements as leave him scarcely a habitation. I do not see any probability of its ever pleasing him, as he appears too whimsical to like the same thing two hours together.

Of him, and of his lady, I can yet judge only from externals. He is, in his person, dress, and deportment, quite fashionable. Her ladyship is no less so ; not handsome, but very smart

in her figure and address, with great spirits, great good humour, and a *goût* for amusement that keeps her invention perpetually employed to find variety. She had a large fortune at her own disposal; the colonel nothing but his commission. All her nearest friends were offended by her marrying him, but that seems no burthen on her mind. Too volatile to think, she is out of the reach of affliction—she sings, she laughs, she dances, and silences the voice of care by the clamour of pleasure.

To these gay folks I am at present a guest; and, if I may judge from their behaviour to me, no unwelcome one. It was an act, not only of great civility, but of great good-nature, to invite me hither, and I am happy in thinking I promote lady Helen's enjoyment of her situation. She says, that till I came, she wanted somebody to talk to, for lady Lucy has little conversation-time. We take a pleasant morning-walk very frequently before the colonel and his lady are stirring, and I can boast the power of making my lively and lovely friend serious in these *tete-à-tetes*. She will listen to me while I point out the beauties of nature that surround us; she will suffer me to dissect the corn-flowers, and remark on their minute construction; and at the end of our tour will ex-

press her wonder that till now she was insensible to the pleasure I have made her acquainted with. After all, it must be said of lady Helen, that she is an amiable woman. I am sure, my dear madam, had you educated her as you have done me, I should have stood a small chance for the first place in your affections. I cannot rejoice in the pre-eminence, because it is purchased at the expence of one I dearly love, though I should now be very loth to resign my precedence. Love lady Helen only as much as she deserves to be loved; she then cannot complain of your indifference: but at all events cherish your partiality for

Your very affectionate

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE,

LETTER LXXXVIII.

MRS. MELROS TO MISS BELVEDERE.

Aspbolm-common, 27th July, 1787.

MY DEAR MADAM,

SHALL I say I rejoice in your absence? No, surely. I should only testify my ingratitude without conveying my meaning. You
are

are away; and I feel myself sunk into the solitary existence I dragged on before I had the happiness of knowing you. I am uncomfortable without you; and yet I am glad of this opportunity of improving our friendship, by revealing to you those particulars which my want of fortitude and collectedness will not suffer me to communicate verbally.

From your very correct opinions and ingenuous sentiments, I soon learnt that you looked on mutual confidence as the basis on which friendship, to be permanent, must be founded. I felt the justness of the position, without the ability to act as the conviction dictated. You have often undesignedly stung me to the quick, by hinting at the unpleasantness of reserve; but if your very amiable qualities, and mature judgment, had not attached me inseparably to you, I could rather have given up the advantage of your friendship, than have revealed the secrets with which my bosom is fraught—secrets which I shudder in recollecting.

When I preface what I am going to unfold to you by a confession, that it will discover much to blame in me, your prudence will perhaps expect, or your good nature will certainly supply an injunction to secrecy. I shrink from the scrutiny of the world: I dread being known.

I am

I am sure you will not betray me, even to Mr. Belvedere; and I rely confidently on that security.

That I may not begin with an imposition, I warn you not to expect every particular of my life: something I must omit, and something I must veil. What I tell you shall be strictly the truth; nothing will I conceal or disguise with a view to extenuate my faults. If I am not as unreserved as you wish, or wherever you perceive any elucidation wanting, do me the justice to believe I am mysterious solely out of regard to others; for as to myself, I have nothing to fear from so merciful an auditor as you; and, were it not prudent, I should withhold no circumstance from you.

My origin is not only humble—it is sordid. My father was the last surviving son of a respectable but ruined family, and rented a very small farm in one of the midland counties of England, in which, by his care and industry, he would probably have thriven, had it not been for the burthen of many children, and for the still more oppressive temper of the landlord under whom we lived, and whose influence I can compare to nothing so fitly as to that of some trees, which will suffer no vegetation in their shade. He would have wrung gold from marble:

ble : incessantly toiling to amass on his estate, and as profusely lavishing in London, his life, during one half of the year, was a series of rapacity, injustice, and oppression ; and in the other, a scene of as extravagant dissipation. In his absence from the country, he delegated his spirit to a steward every way worthy of his employer, and who taught him to check the little progress his tenants could ever make towards opulence, by keeping them on short leases. That his dependents could just live, was thought by master and servant a state of sufficient blessing ; but this policy, like all other selfish endeavours, at last operated against itself. Many of our fellow-sufferers quitted their natural home, and their country, unable to endure the gripe of these iron hands : many a family have I seen departing on foot, laden with the small stock that was to be their venture in a distant land, and execrating the pitiless cruelty that exiled them. But my father had not even this resource : he was, as our landlord would often insultingly tell him, too poor to emigrate : his family, numerous and young, fettered him to the place ; and his love for it was such, that I have heard him say, he would, if it were possible, make bread of the dust of it, rather than quit it.

In

In this state of abject poverty was I born; inured more by need than ability, to labour hard in the grand concern of procuring bread, and accustomed to hear, instead of the cheerful song and rustic merriment, which are poetically annexed to rural occupations, nothing but wailing complaints, dreary forebodings, and desponding resolutions. The misery under which we groaned, necessarily spread a gloom over the minds of my parents, and rendered them, in my eyes, unkind and severe. After the incessant toil of day after day, they looked round on the produce of their labours, and often found it totally consumed in once satisfying the hunger of their children. In short, I may say, that from the time I first remember myself, the aspect of woe never departed from our dwelling; and each succeeding year, as it increased our necessities, aggravated our distress to a degree hardly to be borne.

How, without abhorring myself, can I reflect, that, by my own folly, I added to these bitter sufferings? How can I detail to you, my dear madam, all this folly, without at once resolving to renounce your regard? I saw my father borne down by my misconduct, when he had withstood the evils I have enumerated. It is too true: his firmness never forsook him in all his

his indigence; but the vicious indiscretion of an unworthy child bowed him to the earth. O how shall I face him in the region of justice and retribution; The agony overpowers me, and I must desist.

If I give way to my feelings, I shall never acquit myself of my promise. Be still then, I beseech thee, thou voice of conscience—at least, a season, remit thy severity. Be gone, O memory!—subside, O swelling heart!—repressed be each emotion, while I pour into a bosom as susceptible as it is immaculate, the overflowing measure of my sorrow.

In my father's oppressed situation he derived one small advantage from the number of his children, or rather, I believe I may say, from the vicinity of his farm to the manor-house: we could sometimes make ourselves useful in the family of our landlord, and by that means occasionally earned our living. My brothers were casually employed in errands to the market-town, and I had, still more frequently, needle-work, to do at home for the lady. One summer evening, when I went to the house with something I had finished, in crossing the court-yard, through which my way lay, a very fierce dog, that was chained in the middle of it, broke from his confinement, sprang towards me,

me, and threw me on the ground. *Providential* shall I say it was, that a young gentleman entered the gate at this instant?—he released me—would to Heaven he had not!—But do I dare to date my misfortunes from this instant of mercy? Shall I impiously annex my errors, as a natural consequence, to the divine goodness that rescued me? Surely I was as much after, as before this accident, a free agent:—good and evil were still at the same distance from me; and if I blindly or perversely preferred the latter, shall Providence be charged with having imposed it?

It was near an hour before I recovered from my fright, so far as to think of returning home. The family was absent from the house, and my deliverer had carried me, while I was insensible, to the housekeeper's room, where every assistance was given me. He had left me to female care; but when I grew tolerably composed, he returned, enquired very kindly if I was hurt, and advised that one of the maid-servants should go home with me. The housekeeper herself condescended to this trouble, and related to my parents the narrow escape I had met with. The accident had no bad effect: I was not of so refined a constitution as to suffer

suffer *ideally* by it, and in a night's sleep I forgot it.

The next morning a servant came with an enquiry after me, in the name of the house-keeper, who, in her care for me, desired, that I would, on future occasions, avoid the path that had proved so dangerous to me. My mother was exceedingly flattered by the attention of a person so much our superior, and, to say the truth, as the message was kind, it was a novelty. My father, nevertheless, disdained the obligation; he was oppressed by the master, and he cared little for the sympathy of the domestics.

In a few days, Mrs. Alice, my new friend, called at our cottage, and proposed employing me in making into furniture some linen her lady had just sent to her. The work, under her direction, was not above my capacity. She desired I might come daily to the house to do it, as it would be injured by moving. I was to be paid by being allowed my board while about it, and over and above this, as a gratuity, in the expending which, she said, I was to be my own mistress, she promised me sixpence a day.

You smile, my dear madam, at the magnitude of the temptation:—believe me, at that time

time it appeared to me an object of such importance, that I should have declined no labour to earn it. I had never been possessed of a complete shilling at any one time, and to think that, in two days, I should be richer than ever I had been, was a hope that almost intoxicated me. My mother, very willingly, and my father, not very reluctantly, accepted the offer, and the interval of a day, which preceded my entering on my employment, I spent in rapturous contemplation, determining to purchase with my gains, whatever of clothes, provisions, or furniture, we had sighed in vain for; to satisfy all our wants, and realise all my wishes.

Such, madam, are the errors of childhood, ignorance, and simplicity!—The human mind has no natural geometry. It cannot distinguish magnitudes; nor, till experience has enlightened our judgment, have we any ideas of impossibility. Happy would it have been for me had this been the most incorrect computation I ever made!

I am so prone to ruminate on calamity, that I am become habitually prolix. You have learnt but little of me yet; but this is all I can tell you in this letter. I will not be tardy in resuming the subject; for I should be sorry to
lose

lose an opportunity of assuring you, that I am,
 dear madam,

Your highly obliged, and

Very humble servant,

DOROTHY MELROS.

L E T T E R. LXXXIX.

MRS. MELROS TO MISS BELVEDERE.

29th July.

I THINK, my dear young lady, when I concluded my former letter to you, I had not absolutely entered on my occupation at the mansion-house of our landlord. Before I tell you what followed, I must make you a little acquainted with our cottage æconomics.

The parish we lived in, was abandoned by a careless rector, to a curate, who discharged the duty of it with apostolic zeal and integrity, rewarded by a stipend of 30l. a-year. He was grave in his person and conversation, and possessed of virtues as much beyond my comprehension then, as they are above my praise now.

His descent was from a noble family; but he was too remotely allied to the representative of it,

it, to derive any advantage from the constancy. In the former part of his life, for he was, at the time I speak of, about fifty years old, he had seen better days; he had lived in comparative affluence; but having married a young woman, with only a life-income, he was, by her death, deprived of this provision. He had one son only, and for him a friend had obtained a commission in the army.

My father was well aware of the merit of this pious man, and regarded him as the principal comfort of his melancholy situation. He was indeed an inestimable friend; for he preached Christianity in all its loveliness, he won his hearers by its prospects, and what he taught he enforced by his example.

That my father's oppressed circumstances needed support and encouragement, was the first inducement with Mr. Melros, our worthy curate, to notice us, and, from the hour of his being acquainted with his laborious and inefficacious industry, his benevolence never relaxed. His winter-evenings were frequently spent under our thatched roof; and to his instructions I was first indebted for the ability to read and write.

When the accident happened, which I related in my former letter, he had been about

eight years, our neighbour, and just at that time a bequest of 100*l.* a-year, raised his circumstances to something like opulence. My father now feared he would quit us for some more eligible situation; but this apprehension was groundless. Mr. Melros was attached to the place, and determined here to enjoy his amended fortune. The respect of the neighbourhood was attracted towards him, now that he no longer needed their favour, and his abode became very tolerably comfortable.

To return to my story.—Drest in my Sunday clothes, I set out on the appointed morning to begin my work at the manor-house; and, as I walked, contemplated the delight I should feel in the possession of my promised gains. It was in the month of April; the family was in London, and Mrs. Alice, by consequence, sole directress. A breakfast of tea, and white bread and butter, regaled me on my arrival. My new patroness was very kind in instructing me in my work. I sat in a room which looked to the garden, and I fancied myself in the highest state of felicity. At noon, she brought me a regale of preserved fruits. I dined with her; she gave me a glass of sweet wine, tea in the evening, a supper before I went home, and some little delicacies to carry

to

to my brothers and sister. My sixpence was paid into my hand; I was told to come again next morning; what I had done was approved; and I returned to our cottage, I believe, the happiest creature then in the universe.

I found my father sitting by the fire-side with our reverend friend, who, almost immediately on my entrance, went away. I related all my enjoyments, shewed my wages, and was allowed to retain them. My brothers and sister were gone to bed, and I expected to be told to follow them; but the day was to be, in its beginning and conclusion, a day of wonders. I was ordered to stay, and to listen attentively to what my father had to say to me. I trembled lest it should end in my detention at home on the morrow. He bid me not interrupt him while he spoke, and not to give him a final answer till the next morning. He then told me, that Mr. Melros had so far condescended as to think of me—for a wife!—that the increase of his income now enabled him to marry again, and that he had that evening declared his good intentions, with which he wished me to be immediately acquainted.

Astonished, confounded, and not at all pleased with the offer, I remember I involuntarily covered my face with my hands, and remained,

mained, as I was commanded, silent. My father represented, very forcibly, my extraordinary good fortune; dwelt on Mr. Melros's condescension; bid me think on it, and be ready in the morning to tell him what answer he should return him.

Had I dared, I could immediately have furnished him with a reply; but I was allowed only to promise I would consider what I had heard; and, having received the nocturnal blessing of my parents, I retired, stupified and ungrateful, to my place of rest. The privilege of all complaint, that was not silent, was denied me, lest I should break my sister's light slumber. I envied her tranquility, whose situation had at noon appeared so inferior to mine, and in darkness I sat down to ruminate on that to which I had conceived an aversion, which I could scarcely account for, even to my own satisfaction.

All my former respect for Mr. Melros was now converted into fear and hatred, which every rising thought aggravated. I was just entering my eighteenth year; he, as I have before said, was about fifty; and at this incongruity nature seemed to revolt. His manners were such as excited more of reverence than love; he was invariably grave; and, of austere-

rity, I had seen too much already in my own home, to go abroad in quest of it. I had insensibly learnt to tremble at his frown; I had been accustomed to look up to him as in a sphere infinitely above me; and though I then knew little of the duties of the married state, I saw nothing in it to allure me. My mother was the standard of my judgment; I saw that labour, incessant care, and poverty, were around her; and I considered these evils as consequent on matrimony.

You will perhaps (for I do so myself) think it strange, that a young girl who had so highly valued the gratuity of sixpence a-day, acquired by work, was not dazzled with the prospect of participating an income comparatively so abundant as that of Mr. Melros; but the truth is, I could form no estimate of its value. I could not have been more at a loss had I been told that the mines of Potosi were his, than when I heard he had, besides some trifling personal revenue, one hundred and thirty pounds a-year. The worth of my sixpence a-day was within the scope of my conception; the possession of it was immediate, the disposal of it uncontrouled, and the means of obtaining it, pleasant. All these considerations equally served to strengthen my attachment on one side, and my aversion on the other. I passed the night in fortifying my
courage

courage against the moment of refusal, and when required to give my answer, I did not hesitate. A long admonition followed. I was again referred to the counsel of my thoughts, and dismissed in displeasure to my employment. In tears I began my walk; but as I approached the house, my heart grew lighter, and all uneasiness vanished when I entered it.

The conviction that I had acted foolishly, which, in spite of my obstinacy, I could not silence, made me desirous to conceal what had happened; but the heaviness of my countenance, and the redness of my eyes, attracting the notice of Mrs. Alice, she questioned me. I felt my cheeks glow with confusion, and could only answer, for I was ashamed to confess the truth, that I had offended my father. In what manner? was the next inquiry. I begged to be excused answering it, when Mrs. Alice, bridling into a haughty stiffness, told me, if I had done any thing to offend a parent, it must offend her—that she could not countenance a disobedient child, and that till she was made easy as to the nature of my fault, she could not properly employ me in the house.

Ten thousand dreads now surrounded me, and in violent perturbation I revealed my distress. All that had terrified me in the counte-

nance of Mrs. Alice, at this instant disappeared and became complacence and pity. She wiped the tears from my eyes, bid me be comforted, and promised she would find a way to relieve me. We sat down to breakfast, and for the first time in my life, I experienced the blessing of consolation.

About noon, when I was busy at my work, and alone, somebody knocked at the door of the room I was in. I rose and opened it. The person who had knocked I immediately recognised as the gentleman who had rescued me from the dog. I curtsied in silence, and waited for his commands. He had a bunch of keys in his hand, and, in a stile of respect I had never been used to, he requested to be allowed to fetch a book from one of the presses in the room. He entered;—I offered to go away; but, in a very encouraging tone of voice, he desired I would not, and while he was seeking the book he wanted, asked me if I was not the young woman to whose safety he had so accidentally contributed. A reply in the affirmative, was followed by civil enquiries: a short conversation, consisting, on my part, of monosyllables, followed; and he presently left me.

From Mrs. Alice I learnt, that this young gentleman was a friend of our landlord's; that

he

he had spent some weeks at the manor-house to regain his health after a long illness ; and, that he was shortly to return to town. Suffer me, my dear madam, in speaking of this gentleman, to call him Mr. Smith, which was the name he was best known to me by.

Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, the three succeeding days, I spent in the same way, and with regret saw Sunday, which was to suspend my pleasures, arrive. It was the most irksome day I had ever passed. At church I was distressed by Mr. Melros's doing the duty : I could not even hear him without disgust. The persuasions, the threats with which I had been persecuted only for a short time in the week-days, were now re-iterated all the day long. Every object was odious to me. From being, though for so short a time, accustomed to the elegance of the house I was employed in, our own cottage presented itself to me as a habitation unfit for human beings. My diet was offensive—the rude mirth of my brothers disturbed me, and the comparative elegance of Mrs. Alice's conversation, made my companions appear bores. Mr. Melros came in the evening, and I, to avoid him, spent the time of his visit in a thoughtful ramble.

The rising sun awaked me next morning, and all my joys returned with it. A severe reprehension of my obstinacy, preceded my setting out for my work. I bore it stoically, till my mother hinted to my father, that I was encouraged in my perverseness by living from home. He adopted the supposition, declared, that when I had finished the work I had in hand, I should go no more to the manor-house; and, that unless I was more obedient, he would turn me out of his family.

At hearing this menace, I burst into tears. I saw the only pleasure of my life quitting me, and, immersed in grief, I hastened to communicate my sorrows to my beloved patroness, Mrs. Alice. She was still kinder than ever; but I was not so easily consoled as before.

In the height of my agitation, Mr. Smith, whom I had not seen since the day I mentioned, came in. I was ashamed of my tears; but I could not stop them. They excited his curiosity, and Mrs. Alice satisfied it, by telling him all the circumstances of my distress. Let me do him the justice to say, that if ever disinterested commiseration and genuine pity entered a human heart, I firmly believe they then occupied his. He interrogated me as to the state of my affections,

affections, and when I had said that, without having any other partiality, I must, to be obedient, be wretched—he exclaimed, with all the zeal of compassionate resentment, against the conduct of my relations, and pledged himself to defend me; to all which kindness I could, for some minutes, return no answer but convulsive sobs.

As the readiest means of freeing me, Mr. Smith offered to apply personally to my father, or to Mr. Melros; but in neither of these applications had I any faith. I feared irritating my father, by having disclosed his severity; and of Mr. Melros I had conceived an opinion so injurious, that I was firmly persuaded resistance would but increase his resolution.

Nothing that Mrs. Alice or Mr. Smith could promise, was wanting to comfort me: they proposed many expedients to save me, but in all of them I saw parental authority could predominate, and, therefore, I doubted their efficacy. Mr. Smith then advised my openly avowing to Mr. Melros my dislike of him, and assured me I should find him inclined to release me when he knew it, as it would be inconsistent with the regard he and every person must be supposed to have for their own happiness, to combat aversion in such a case. To this proposition I ac-

ceded : Mr. Smith furnished me with the arguments I should use, and solemnly bound himself, should he be deceived in his expectations, to find some other means for this purpose. Mrs. Alice too gave me her word to counteract any design of keeping me from her, and I was less miserable.

And here, madam, let me close this tedious letter. When I tell you all this has been written at one sitting, I need not add that I am advancing towards my usual state of health ; nor, if diligence in obeying your commands is an argument of sincere attachment, that I am most respectfully,

Your very humble servant,

DOROTHY MELROS.

LETTER XC.

MRS. MELROS TO MISS BELVEDERE.

1st August.

IT is not, I believe, always certain, that what is interesting to write, is agreeable to read. Self-importance is a mist through which it is very difficult to discover the proper form of objects,

jects, and there is a charm in egotism, which acts only on the egotist. Hence it arises, that we read with indifference and disgust, narratives which appear to the writer full of novelty and wonder. At the time of suffering, the sufferer is wholly occupied by the passing event; and when escaped danger, or in the possession of pleasure, he determines to communicate the occurrences which have agitated him; but unless he can likewise communicate the effect, unless he can put the mind of his reader or hearer into the trepidation he felt, he may recount to eternity every minute particular of his joys or his sorrows, and excite no passion.

Against this conviction, and not very confident in my own powers, I yet hope, my dear madam, that you read my narratory letters with eagerness. My dependence is on the tender balance of your heart. I flatter myself I have your prepossession in my favour, and when that, or affection has interested us, the work of attachment is performed. Should you, however, feel weary before I conclude, a slight prohibition will stop me. It would spare me pain:—it would spare you perhaps some unavailing tears,

The effect of the shock my mind had received in the morning, continued almost all day, and in such force as to prevent my going on with my work. I could not justly accept what I could not earn, and I offered to go home, not very desirous, as you will believe, of permission to do so. It was not granted me. The remainder of the day was spent in endeavours to amuse me : Mrs. Alice scarcely left me, and Mr. Smith was much with us. Thus, in a few days, you see an acquaintance, begun in terror, and continued by misfortune, converted into intimacy — *intimacy* indeed, I should not call it, for that implies reciprocation. The poverty of my state of life, my ignorance, and rustic bashfulness, rendered me wholly passive. I had not yet learnt to speak my sentiments freely, and the embarrassment I felt, when obliged to address myself to Mr. Smith, was such as scared my recollection.

At night, when my unwilling feet had reached our cottage, the first person I saw was he whom I most desired to shun. My courage had however been made steady by the precepts of the day. I now scorned to absent myself, and almost hoped the subject would be mentioned, that I might have an opportunity of shewing

shewing what I dared to do ; but Mr. Melros
 had never himself even hinted at it ; it had
 never been spoken of to me in his presence,
 and, in spite of all my bravery, I could not in-
 troduce it. The expression of my countenance,
 which, if it suited the feelings of my heart,
 was, I am sure, insolent and ill-natured, I sup-
 pose attracted his notice. He looked stedfastly
 at me on my entrance, and after I had taken
 my place in our circle, I had the assurance to
 ask him, pertly, what he looked at ? With a
 good humoured smile he replied,—at me. I
 told him, in the language of vulgar taunt, I
 wished his eyes a better object. My father
 and mother stared ; but I was intoxicated
 with malignity, and had lost all fear. Mr.
 Melros, to my saucy wish rejoined, that if he
 could see me happy, he desired no better an ob-
 ject of his regard. Here was the opportunity
 for me to have followed the directions that had
 been given me, and to have coolly and frankly
 stated what, after so gentle an expression, I
 might have hoped would be heard with tender-
 ness and efficacy ; but this would have been
 the conduct of a *rational* being, a distinction I
 had at that time renounced. I took the bene-
 volent civility of him I was endeavouring to
 affront, as a declaration of war :—rage almost

choked me, and, in the utmost indignation, I quitted the room. My mother followed me: I had acquired all the fury of obstinacy: she could make no impression on me, and having locked me into her chamber, she left me. Here I continued in sullen sorrow till Mr. Melros went, when she released me and drove me to bed.

Had I been sure of a good reception from Mrs. Alice, I verily believe I should have made some effort to escape to her; but I feared her displeasure, if I was guilty of an act so openly disobedient. I comforted myself that I had only to wait till the morning. The morning came, and I prepared to depart; not, I own, with any impatience to relate what had passed: I had deviated from Mr. Smith's injunctions to be firm and cool in my remonstrance, and I felt ashamed of my folly and madness.

I was very near being spared the pain of relating it; for my father coming in to breakfast, just as I was setting out, forbid my going:—he said he would himself go to the mansion-house, and excuse my absence; that he saw I had bad advisers, and that I should leave home no more. Happy had it been for me had he persisted in this resolution; but my tears and intreaties moved him. He upbraided me with my perverseness and want of duty, and adding, while
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the tears streamed down his furrowed cheeks, that he foresaw I should break his heart,—all my stubbornness was in a moment conquered. I threw myself on my knees before him; I acknowledged myself inexcusable, and I promised, if he would give me time, I would endeavour to submit. He consented to suspend the subject for a week, and dismissed me, not unkindly.

By this truce I gained nothing but the continuation of my pleasures at the place of my employment. While the impression my father's sorrow made on me remained, I was in idea all obedience, and I felt as if I could have sacrificed my life to his will; but by the time I reached the manor-house, the image of Mr. Melros had effaced all that was springing up of goodness in my mind, and I was nearly as obdurate as before. Mrs. Alice, I knew, would not suffer me to be compelled, without some effort on her part to save me, and I began to hope that Mr. Smith might awe my father into desisting.

My two friends were eager to hear what had occurred, and I told it all. Mrs. Alice laughed at the violence of my opposition. Mr. Smith was thoughtful on it; he talked to me more seriously than ever, and advised me to
some

some more rational mode of proceeding. He told me, (O that I had never forgotten his words!) that filial duty, and parental affection, were not things to be sported with; that it was natural and right for me to regard, in the first place, the preservation of my own peace, but that it behoved me to be, in the next degree, careful of my father's. No law or duty, said he, obliges you to make yourself miserable; but if you cannot avoid it without resisting your father's will, at least, let the resistance be no more than is adequate to the purpose. Soften it as much as you can; refer yourself rather to his tenderness than your own power, and you will be much more likely to carry your point.

While he was speaking, Mrs. Alice had left us. He asked if his staying, when she was away, was disagreeable to me? The tears were streaming from my eyes, and I could scarcely say—No. He could however perceive I did not wish him gone, and he proceeded:—I am anxious, said he, to have some scheme of conduct marked out to you, because, in a few days, I must quit you, and I should be sorry to go while there was a possibility of my being useful to you.

Simplicity, and the dread of danger, overcame my diffidence at this instant, and on hearing

ing him mention leaving me, I involuntarily exclaimed—Are you going, sir?—what will become of me? He started at the emotion with which I spoke, and coming forward from the window, against which he had been leaning, asked me with earnestness, if I was sorry to part from him. I had now seen the presumption of my question, and only begged him to forgive it. He seated himself by me, and endeavoured to cheer me into frankness, by repeating his offers to serve my cause. You have unintentionally, said he, made me hope that I can assist you; let me immediately try; let me go to your father, or to Mr. Melros; let me tell them the state of your mind. O no, no, I replied—what would they say to me, for having told it to a stranger?—what excuse could I make for having done so? Leave that to me, said my generous protector;—hear me, and judge if I cannot effect something. As a stranger, or as an accidental acquaintance, it might indeed be objected to me, that I officiously intruded, by taking a part in your private concerns; but if you would allow me to declare a truth which yet I have concealed, that I love you, and to add to it, that I am beloved by you, it would give me a right to defend you.

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To this declaration, which had overwhelmed me with astonishment, I was spared the pain of replying, by the entrance of Mrs. Alice, who, I soon found, had overheard our conversation. Her countenance shewed displeasure, and my fluttering heart was fast sinking with fear that I had offended and forfeited my best friend. She rather sharply reminded Mr. Smith, that his father never could approve the words she had just heard him utter. He desperately replied, he could think of nothing that opposed his relieving me. What followed between them, I know not; they retired to a distance, and spoke low: he talked with great earnestness, and she became placid.

Mr. Smith soon joined me, and repeating his avowal, conjured me to give him a title to interest himself for me, by accepting and returning his affection; but I had now had time to think. Reason and duty told me, that I could not usurp a power I denied my father. If, armed with parental authority, I disputed his right to dispose of me without my consent, what was my claim to that of bestowing myself without his. In broken accents I thanked him for his goodness, and told him I could do nothing without my father's approbation. This
did

did not satisfy him. He said he pressed only for that which a parent could not give away, and on which all his future exertions for me must be founded, to be effectual. Want of words kept me silent—I had no foresight—I had no reasoning power—I derived encouragement even from Mrs. Alice's declaring herself neuter, and after a solicitation of about two hours, I found that I had promised eternal love and fidelity to a person whom I had not known a week!

If I may have hitherto, my dear madam, escaped your displeasure, I fear, after this confession, I cannot retain it. Let me plead in extenuation, the then state of my mind. Harassed at home, I sought for comfort abroad. Persecuted, as I thought, by my nearest friends, I flew to strangers for relief. Nor was it only a desire to shun misfortune, that made me thus rash. I had much to repel me on the side of evil;—there was still more to attract me in the good offered me. I knew indeed little of him to whom I had pledged myself; but that little had engaged my passions. We were nearly equal in years; his manners were encouraging and very honestly insinuating; and his kindness had filled me with gratitude. He was, in my idea, exactly the reverse of Mr. Melros; his love in-

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fured me protection, and I was not without hope, that if he was as rich as he who was to have been forced upon me, my father, whose view Mrs. Alice assured me was wholly directed to money, would accept the substitution.

This hasty capitulation made, our conduct was to be planned. Mr. Smith told me how he was circumstanced. His father lived in London, not in great opulence, but in substantial credit, and on him he was intirely dependent, till he reached the age of twenty-one, of which he then wanted between five and six months. At that time, he was to become, in some measure, his own master, as an estate of 200l. a year would then be his, but only on condition that till then he remained unmarried. He lamented, more than myself, this prohibition. I considered it only as a delay, and thought I could endure a persecution twice as long, which was to be so rewarded. I did not see the misery wrapped up in this circumstance; I did not conceive that it could be, as it proved, the ruin of our prospect and my peace. I soon, however, clearly understood that it made all present application to my father impracticable. It was not impossible that he might have been reconciled to us, if we had been first married, and then solicited his forgiveness, but in such a
situation

situation as our's, as it would have been folly to expect his concurrence, it was absurd to imagine he would not betray and separate us.

However our illicit contract may be blamed, no great imprudence was to be imputed to us in adjusting our plan. We young folks, contrary to the advice of Mrs. Alice, agreed to wait the expiration of these months. She proposed a private marriage; but Mr. Smith observed, that he must then hazard the possibility of maintaining me on the single and precarious chance of his father's mercy, and that, should the secret transpire, we were ruined. To wait, was therefore finally agreed on. Mr. Smith left us to go to the post-town for letters, and I sat down to my work with a light, if not a tranquil, heart.

The character Mrs. Alice now gave me of the gentleman who had so pitied and so honoured me, was such as increased my love and gratitude to him. I promised myself halcyon days, if I could but weather the surrounding tempest; but of the possibility of doing this I could form no just estimation. I was to be firm in an opposition I knew not how to support; I was to live under displeasure, to hear reiterated sollicitation, and yet to avoid such extremities as would drive me from home. Hope
smoothed

smoothed these difficulties, and my eyes in contemplating the distant prospect, very willingly overlooked the gulph before me.

It was, you will believe, no addition to my happiness when Mr. Smith returned with a letter from his father, in which he peremptorily required him to return to town within a week. I found I had been the cause of his delay hitherto, and therefore could not reasonably complain of the necessity. He promised to write to me frequently, which, through the medium of our common friend, was practicable. We were forced to submit, and had only to enjoy the few days we were allowed to spend together.

It was now Tuesday, and the two following days were passed, not in simple peace, but in exquisite felicity. Because I was for one week freed from importunity about Mr. Melros, I forgot it would ever be renewed. That Mr. Smith would leave me, was a consideration obliterated in the pleasure of his being then with me, and that I was to endure near six months torture was nothing; for at the end of six months I was to be happy. Yes, madam, I dared to think at that time, when I was laying the corner-stone of misery, that I was approaching to happiness. I could not indeed quite get over the fear of Mr. Smith's father's displeasure;

displeasure; but he assured me he was of a temper, though warm, forgiving; and, as for my own father, I had arithmetic enough to know that 200*l.* a year was more than Mr. Melros's income, and I concluded on his final approbation. Little did I know my father!

In the night of Thursday, this valuable parent, of whom I had conceived an opinion so unworthy, was seized with a violent illness. My mother could not spare me, nor did my own inclination at all prompt me to go the next day to my work, for my father was in great danger. Mr. Melros, the friend, the physician of his flock, came to his assistance. He was then insensible, and I was sitting on his bed drowned in tears, which had but one source. I can truly say that, in apprehension for my father, I had forgotten all my own danger, all my past pleasures, and all my future expectations. I could even see Mr. Melros with joy; I regarded him as my only hope, and at the moment when he declared his doubt of my father's recovery, I could willingly have made myself the price of his cure, would my consenting to be wretched have availed.

Friday was a day of agonizing suspense. Mr. Smith sent me messages by Mrs. Alice, tending to comfort and encourage me; he lamented that
he

he could not see me, but I did not wish it. My father engrossed my attention, and I felt as if a thought bestowed on any one else would have been robbing of him. In all his delirium he had called incessantly for me. He was frantic if I was out of his sight, and, as if he had a presentiment of what followed, he was perpetually haunted with an idea that I was in danger. In the evening of this day, his disorder abated; he continued to mend during Saturday, and on Sunday seemed to want only strength.

It was on Sunday afternoon, just when Mrs. Alice had quitted his room, that he called me to him, and having made me sit down by his chair, he, in accents that pierced my very soul, thanked me for the tenderness I had shewn to him, which he said Mr. Melros had told him, was, during the time of his delirium, as great as when he was sensible of it. He said, that he felt himself considerably mended; but that, as at his time of life recovery was not so certain as in a younger person, it behoved him to think of settling, as well his few temporal, as his numerous and more important spiritual affairs. There was one heavy concern, he said, that dwelt on his heart. Care for his family distressed him, but more particularly that he
felt

felt for me. It was necessary, he said, whether it pleased God to take his life, or restore his health, that as many of his children as could earn their living, should seek it. The burthen of a numerous family might be borne while their wants were few; but to keep those at home who might be useful elsewhere, was aggravating poverty. Me, he said, my age and sex made him less willing to part from, as he knew not where to place me in safety and comfort. My constitution would not bear labour; my education had not taught me any thing above it. He himself reminded me of his promise to be silent for one week, on the subject of Mr. Melros. This period, he said, he knew was not quite expired; he did not mean to urge me to an unfair determination—he only wished to prepare me to give my final answer. I knew not, he said, what I refused in refusing Mr. Melros, nor could I ever judge of the chance I had for happiness with him, if I kept at such an obstinate distance from him. He then bid me tell him ingenuously on what I founded my objections.

I very coolly, but as firmly as I could, named his age, his severity of manners, and the awe I felt in his presence, as insuperable obstacles to my liking him. I owned him en-
titled

titled to all possible respect and gratitude from us; at the same time I, in language I had been taught by Mr. Smith, represented the improbability of either his or my being tolerably easy, if we came together on a motive no more cogent. Dorothy, cried my father, endeavouring, notwithstanding his weakness, to rise from his chair, you have been tutored—tell me instantly whom you advised with. In my life I never had uttered a falsehood, and I could not pronounce the denial my heart now prompted. I was silent, and to the last degree distressed. My father iterated his question. I answered, that I had been obliged to tell Mrs. Alice what had so frequently sent me to her in tears, and that she assured me I never could be happy in marrying a man I did not like. Then I have done, said my father: *your perverseness* I hoped I could conquer; but if you are backed by people equally ignorant and obstinate with yourself, I have no resource. Those who encourage you in your stubbornness, are not aware of your situation, or the advantage offered you; but you have till Tuesday morning to consider what you will do.

It now occurred to me, that by suffering a little more pain at present, which could not be so exquisite as at a renewal, I might get rid of the

the subject, and perhaps carry to Mr. Smith the news of my victory next morning, when Mrs. Alice, for reasons known to me, had begged that I might resume my work. I therefore resolved, at this moment, to give him my final determination; which was not, I confess, so much strengthened by any increasing dislike to Mr. Melros, as by my engagement to Mr. Smith. In the most submissive manner and words I could devise, I intreated my father to abandon his intention. I told him I asked no more time for consideration: were I to think for ever, my resolution would be the same. I would submit to any means he would prescribe by which I could earn my bread, but, young as I was, it was of importance to me to take care of the remainder of my life, since I might have many years of sorrow to endure.

Gently and guardedly as I delivered this ultimate opinion, the disappointment, or the commotion of his anger, overpowered my father, and I saw him drop from his chair, without my being able either to assist him, or to call any one for that purpose. I leant over him, and bathing his face in my tears, I reproached myself aloud with this horrid parricide. My violent grief, and vehement expression of it, roused him: he recovered; I placed him in his

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chair, and terrified, almost to frenzy, lest he should relapse, I reiterated promises of absolute acquiescence and obedience. My reason, and my memory seemed to have abandoned me; the present danger was all I feared. I intreated my father to be calm, and, in my madness, vowed nothing could make me so happy as doing what should please him. Nor was this all:—my terrors, by presenting to me the danger of his again sinking under the emotion of his passion, made me desirous of immediately removing from his mind all idea of my reluctance. I owned Mr. Melros had won on my good opinion, and undertook for my treacherous heart, that it would find no difficulty in converting esteem into love.

No words I can use, my dear madam, can convey to you an adequate idea of his joy. It is as impossible to describe what I felt when my reason resumed its place. My whole soul was undergoing a conflict beyond the utmost fury of the elements. When I thought on what I had done, I was writhing with agony; when I thought on the peril I did it to avoid, I abhorred myself for admitting a thought of regret. In the malignity of perverseness, I thanked God it had been in my power to submit, and at the same instant my heart seemed bursting with

with rage. I was in the situation of a malefactor on the wheel, who, to shew an inflexible hardiness, laughs while he is fainting under his tortures. Greatly as I have suffered since, each calamitous day of my life yields in wretchedness to that hour. How I bore it; is, even now, astonishing to myself;—to think on it is madness.—Adieu. I dare not read what I have written. Like Macbeth, ‘I dare not look on what I have done.’

DOROTHY MELROS.

LETTER XCI.

MRS. MELROS TO MISS BELVEDERE.

BEHOLD me now, my dear madam, terrified into the choice of this horrid marriage, and consenting to my own wretchedness. I had brought myself into a dilemma from which, without the breach of a solemn promise, I could not extricate myself. I had vowed eternal constancy to Mr. Smith, and absolute obedience to my father;—two things incompatible with each other. To complete the distraction of my mind, Mr. Melros came to visit my father

soon after I had sealed my doom. I was sent out of hearing while he was informed of my submission, and called in again to receive his thanks for my compliance. A thousand times was I prompted to resume my former unbowing spirit; but something which seemed to sound the words, *your father, your father*, whenever this thought arose, deterred me. I saw joy quivering in his eyes and on his lips, and I could not be so barbarous as to hurry him again into the abyss of sorrow. Mr. Melros required my hand in token of our contract. I gave it him in a silent stupor, and he begged to speak with me alone.

This request I, without reluctance, rose to grant; for I could then at least acquaint him, if not with my affection for another, yet with my want of all for him; but even this outlet was barred to me. My father opposed our leaving the room; and when, on Mr. Melros's urging it, he waved his objection, he called me to him, and, in a low voice said these words to me:—if you intend doing any thing to disappoint me, it would be more charity in you at once to cut my throat.—O, my dear madam! can you imagine the chill that at that instant iced my whole mass of blood? I could not promise I would not do, nor could I now
have

have done, what he feared. I followed Mr. Melros into another room, and with streaming eyes, listened to him while he said:—I am not surprised, my dear girl, at the little inclination you have hitherto shewn to my wishes. I never expected a return of affection; I have no right to it. Neither my person, nor age, nor, I believe, my manners, are calculated to conciliate love. If I marry you, it is from two motives; the tenderest regard for you, and a desire to improve the situation of your father and his family; but at the price of your peace, I cannot purchase even this desirable ability. Tell me then fairly, what are your sentiments about me, and trust me, your ease shall be the thing first consulted. Perhaps some one of your equals has gained your heart: tell me so, and I will intercede with your father for him. Say any thing, but that you hate me, and I will forego my prospect of being your husband, for the superior title of your friend.

Here he paused, and I now perceived, that had he pleaded his own cause at first, instead of employing parental authority as his advocate, I could have listened without disgust. The sternness of his aspect was softened by pity; I saw him ready to gratify me at any expence; I remembered his virtues; I recollected his con-

descention in looking down to me, and his attendance on my father. I felt grateful for his pity; I exulted in the hope of establishing my father's happiness, by being the means of relieving his poverty; and without compulsion or farther sollicitation, I resolved on obedience. I excused myself, in the best manner I could, for my past ingratitude, and promised, if he would accept me, to be his willing wife.

Thus was I foolish enough to think I had insured my peace. I had, in my own idea, withdrawn all my wandering affections, and centered them in Mr. Melros; but the moment of solitude was the moment of conviction that I judged most erroneously. My resolution to obey did not indeed waver; but to obey, wholly without reluctance, I again found impossible. And how was I to face Mr. Smith, or inform him of what had happened? Mrs. Alice had been promised, by my mother, that I should come to her on Monday morning. I could, it was true, avoid going; but what a suspense must Mr. Smith remain in, and what must he think of me? He was to set off for London in the afternoon of that day, and surely he ought to know what I had done. To go to the house in the morning, I, most foolishly and rashly, judged most prudent. My scheme was, to de-
clare

declare my situation to Mrs. Alice, to engage her to acquaint Mr. Smith with it, without my seeing him, and immediately to return home, and wait there till he had left the country. How this was to be done, in spite of the internal opposition I felt, I never asked myself: to do it, was my firm intention.

A night passed without sleep, did not render me fitter for the exertion of this fortitude. I trembled when I thought on the business I was to go through; but I did not recede. I went to my work. Mrs. Alice was busy among the servants: I saw her, but could not speak to her. She told me, if I would go to the room we usually sat in, she would come to me. I reached the door of it, and congratulated myself that I had not in my way to it met Mr. Smith. I said to myself, I would lock the door, and open it to none but Mrs. Alice.

How vain was my prudence! how contracted my foresight! Mr. Smith was waiting in the room for me, and received me with open arms. I retreated from him: he was astonished, and enquired what this reluctance meant. I could only say, We are for ever parted—and was sinking, when he caught me; and while he endeavoured to sooth, augmented the commotion of my soul.

To this hour it is matter of wonder to me, that when I recovered my speech, I had power to tell him succinctly to what I had been compelled, by my apprehensions and my weakness; but I did so. I expected, and I did not fear his anger; I was prepared for his rage, his reproaches, and his quitting me. All this I could have stood; for I had armed myself against it; but it was only to this species of assault that I was invulnerable: against that I met with, my spirit could make no resistance. He pitied me, and I was overcome with shame; he commended my obedience, while I deplored my folly; and he left me, saying, that if his suffering could insure my happiness, he loved me too well to repine at it.

Mrs. Alice soon came to me, and I found she had learned from Mr. Smith, what I felt I had not power to repeat. The tears on my cheeks declared my fortitude not stoicism, and thence perhaps inferring that my tongue and heart had been at variance, she stated to me, that in what I called obedience and submission, there was a degree of criminality I had not perceived. She told me, if I could truly say my heart was Mr. Melros's, I might conscientiously become his wife; but that if another had a share in it, I was preparing to utter a falsehood

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at the altar. She hinted, with a sarcastic set of her features, that if I had overcome my regard for Mr. Smith, I might pride myself on being a good daughter, but that I must make no pretensions to *sense or gratitude*; for that, if I recollected his kindness and his disposition to have served me in any way I would point out, I must acknowledge him the best friend I ever had or could have. I could not bear these wounding insinuations; my heart shrunk from its boasted height, and I was weak enough to beg the counsel, and promise to follow the guidance of the only person in the world it behoved me to distrust.

The only point on which this artful woman could immediately determine, was, that I must not follow my last-formed intentions. Unstable as was my mind, I now thought myself happy in escaping the marriage I had consented to; and I blush while I tell you, that I listened no longer to the calls of duty, faith, or truth, but determined to be led implicitly by my present advisers. Mrs. Alice went out to talk with Mr. Smith, and brought him to me. She had convinced him too, that he was doing meritously in saving me from Mr. Melros; and we both referred ourselves to her for directions how we should act. Her advice was prompt

and brief. A post-chaise had been ordered to carry Mr. Smith to town early in the afternoon, and she proposed his taking me with him to London, where she had a sister to whom she would give him a letter, and who would accommodate me with board and lodging for the time we should be forced to secrecy. It was agreed, that to this person he should be recommended under the name of *Smith*, which, I have before hinted to you, was an assumed designation.

Will you give me credit, my dear madam, when I assert, that I saw not whither this advice tended? Distracted as I was by veering opinions, I looked on this flight as the only means by which I could procure quiet. Mr. Smith, as mad as myself, approved the scheme, and I consented to it. My insidious directress assured me, that she could, and would make all easy with my father. She cheered me, by representing the joy he, whose heart must be set on money, would feel, at hearing I was the wife of such a gentleman; and I began to think that, excepting in my breach of promise to Mr. Melros, I was acting with great propriety.

Two hours were to elapse before the time of our elopement, and I had time for doubts and hesitations. These, however, were soon overcome.

come. It occurred to me that, if the servants of the house saw me set off, I might be fetched back ; but against this, my provident friend had secured me. Before the chaise came, she dismissed me, and, in the hearing of some of the servants, told me, that as my father had lately been ill, I might go home to relieve my mother. My private directions were to remain in a field near the house, and from thence Mr. Smith took me. With no provision of clothes for my journey ; in my straw hat and linsley gown, did I abandon the peace and innocence I had lived in, and rush with open eyes on ruin.

It is for a very short time that a mind, not clouded by habitual guilt, can exclude the light of conscience. The moment I lost sight of my native village, I felt myself wretched, and Mr. Smith's exertions could not sooth me. Another scene, however, soon occupied my attention : we entered London in the evening, and I forgot my sorrow in the astonishment of novelty. Mr. Smith left me at the house we were directed to : he promised to see me early the next morning ; and here, to a stranger, in a strange house, in a strange place, was I to look for all the comfort allowed me.

A few days equipped me in decent apparel, at Mr. Smith's expence; and the leisure of my situation was filled up by such tuition as he thought necessary for my appearance in this novel sphere of life. My landlady was extremely kind. Mrs. Alice wrote, that my father, though vexed at my deceiving Mr. Melros, was not very angry, and as soon as I was married, would see me; but that, till then, he would not hear of me. This improbable story, as it suited my wishes, I eagerly believed. I had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Smith generally twice a-day, and my regard and respect for him increased with our acquaintance. Thus we lived for six weeks; I, counting the hours as they passed and shortened the time of waiting, and he, solicitously endeavouring to convince me of his love and his integrity.

At the end of this time, my landlady suggested to me, that she was uneasy at the doubtful character I appeared in: she found it necessary to inform my simplicity, that there were unfavourable suspicions which Mr. Smith's visits would excite, and she therefore warned me, that, as she was very scrupulous in the reputation of her house, I must either remove; or prematurely assume the character of a married woman.

To

To this presumption I could not consent without Mr. Smith's approbation, and I referred it to him. As to remove me would be dangerous to our interests, and the alternative seemed to have nothing worse in it than folly and affectation, we accepted it. Mr. Smith furnished me with a ring, and to all my landlady's visitors I appeared as his wife. His father shortly after went out of town, and my generous lover devoted all his leisure to me. This liberty, which I then rejoiced in, contributed to my most pungent sufferings. When I knew the hours at which I might expect Mr. Smith, and that his time for staying with me was limited to a very short space, I could not but receive him with some sort of distant ceremony, and scarcely ever was the interval long enough to tell him half I had to say; but now, when we were almost all day together, a degree of familiarity ensued, which, aided by the abominable casuistry of my landlady, and the peculiar circumstances of our situation, produced in us a persuasion, that the ceremony our marriage wanted, did not affect its validity; that it was only a ratification; and that, in the eye of Heaven, our mutual promise contained all the essence of an ecclesiastical union.

One

One consequence of admitting this sophistical principal, is generally a resolution, that the rite is in itself nugatory and useless; but to this length neither of us ever went. It was, I can safely assert, as much our intention, at the moment of our parting, to make matrimony the basis of our union, as on the day when we fled together; and that I was not Mr. Smith's wife, even before her came of age, and against the will of his father, is wholly to be imputed to myself.

Mrs. Alice had, as may be supposed, intelligence of us from her sister. As soon as her power to disgrace me was complete, this once seemingly kind friend threw off the mask, and, in a letter to Mr. Smith, demanded compensation for the trouble she had taken to secure me to him. She threatened to disclose all she knew, if he hesitated; she boasted her ability to ruin, not only Mr. Smith and myself, but my father and his family, by preventing a renewal of his lease. Twenty pounds was the sum this capricious, deceitful woman insisted on. The money could ill be spared; but we were forced to comply, and it was sent to her.

As Mr. Smith's annual income was narrow, and could be stopped at pleasure by his father, he had borrowed of a friend as much as was
 necessary

necessary for my maintenance, and as we were never to expect affluence, every guinea was of importance to us. Judge then, madam, what was our distress, when we found that the former remittance had not satisfied the greedy wretch, and that she was more clamorous than before.

I now saw plainly into the character of Mrs. Alice and her sister:—the former had, in effect, sold me, and the latter had, by ridiculing my scruples, and affecting to be dissatisfied while I did not stifle and think myself a wife, driven me to such extremities as made resistance to the most unreasonable demands imprudent. Again the harpy was appeased, and we hoped that, as about four months of the time we were dragging through were expired, the duration of this tyranny could not be long.

To my infinite joy I saw myself without any additional misfortune within a few weeks of the wished-for period. Mr. Smith's father was still absent from London, and my lover proposed leaving me for three or four days, that he might look at a house thirty miles from town, to which, in case of his father's violent displeasure, he might remove me, and where I might live in cheap obscurity. To this, unwilling as I ever was to part from him, I could not object, and

and he set off, reminding me at the instant of his going, of whatever could cheer my spirits.

He had left directions with me to send to a friend's house for his letters, to open them, and if there were any that required immediate returns, to forward them. The first post after he was gone, brought one from his father. I saw by the beginning that it referred to others on the subject: it was in a style of asperity, and reproached Mr. Smith with folly, obstinacy, and cruelty, in refusing, as I understood, to marry a lady with great wealth, and whose attachment to him had injured her health, and it ended in nearly these words:—‘I can no otherwise account for this stubbornness, than by supposing you are negotiating a clandestine marriage, or that you are engaged in some illicit connection. You know my temper, I think, too well to run such a risque of offending me; but as I hear you are much more in ***** street than at the compting-house, I shall hasten to town to find out the attractive there. If it is what I suspect, you have no alternative but to marry Miss *****, or be an outcast from your family.’

Every reading of this cruel paragraph increased the terror it inspired me with. In vain I wished

I wished for some one to advise with : I had no one I could confide in. My fears made me every moment fancy I heard Mr. Smith's father entering. I saw the danger in its fullest magnitude, but no means to avert it. To inform Mr. Smith of it, in time to prevent the evil, was impossible : his father might then be in London, and on his way to me : for my own safety, I was too desperate to care ; but that I should ruin one who had been so generous, so affectionate, and so tender to me, was my grand cause of sorrow.

The expediency of flight I at length resolved on ;—and then occurred the question, Whither shall I fly ?—No father's house will receive me :—I have neither home nor friends.—And what end was to be answered by flying, other than that of avoiding perhaps transient fury ?—Unless I renounced the son, I did nothing in escaping the father :—this was tearing my living heart from my side ; but it was the only method I could devise, of preventing that which no personal sufferings of my own could equal.

On this then I decided ; and in an agony of grief sat down to bid him whom I loved with my whole affection, an eternal adieu. I told him my intention : I conjured him by his love for me, to do what his father required : I en-

closed

closed the stern letter and my ring, and with more fortitude than I knew myself possessed of, I dispatched this renunciation of my promised felicity.

The next thing to be done was to dispose of myself; and this was nearly as difficult. *Towards*, though not *to* my native home, I at last resolved to steer, trusting that Providence would yet interpose and direct me. Of five guineas, my whole stock of money, I was forced to give three to my landlady, to bribe her to my interest: the other two were necessary to my travelling expences. My cloaths I could not regard as my own: I therefore took only what I had on, one change, and my linsey gown and straw hat. With this bundle, and a heart bursting with every tormenting sensation, I left the house, and went to the inn where the stage that suited my course best, put up: it was just preparing to set out: there was a vacant place, and we immediately quitted London.

Here, my dear madam, let me, for the present, drop my melancholy theme. When I recollect the sufferings of that journey, my reason can scarcely maintain its post.

Adieu, May you ever be preserved as much a stranger to the misfortunes, as you are to the errors of your very humble servant,

DOROTHY MELROS.

LETTER

LETTER XCII.

MRS. MELROS TO MISS BELVEDERE.

IT was in the close of the month of August, that I left London. The coach was to reach its destination about midnight: my companions were all alive to fear of highwaymen, and other travelling dangers, but my mind was full, and I enjoyed the wretched privilege of this exemption. Early in the evening, however, their apprehensions were realised, and I was disturbed in my melancholy ruminations by hearing an injunction to stop, and seeing a pistol thrust into the coach by a man with a crape over his face. We surrendered the contents of our pockets; I, all the money I had in the world: some of it had been advanced at setting out; the rest I gave up, and was thus stripped of the means of paying what remained due for my passage. The rest of the travellers comforted themselves, some that they were going home, others, that the friends they were going to, would supply them with cash; but I had no such resource. The fear of detention, or of being exposed to enquiry, awakened me to a sense of my danger; the only way of avoiding which was

was to leave the coach when it next stopped. This would be the middle of our journey, and in equity I therefore could not be required to complete my payment. Under pretence of indisposition, I declared my intention: it was objected to at first; but on my telling the coachman I could not replace the money I had lost, he suffered me to do as I would.

My feet were now to be my only conductors, and to subsist by the way, as I must be many hours on the road, I sold my bundle to the maid of the inn for a few shillings. I then enquired my road, and set out, by the light of the rising moon, intending to reach the next village that night.

The bodily ease I had for some months been accustomed to, made walking more than commonly laborious to me; and I was often obliged to sit down. Notwithstanding this, I reached the village I had steered towards, in time to procure a little food and a bed; and the next morning, compelled by my poverty to disregard a heavy rain, I resumed my weary way. Soon after I left the village, I had the good fortune to overtake a loaded cart: this I hoped would spare my galled feet. I applied to the carter, and for the little money I had left, he promised to carry me to a place which I knew to be but

six miles from my father's: To this, my natural, but forfeited home, I seemed impelled by a privation of all other retreat, and thither I must go. I could not expect a willing admittance, yet from what Mrs. Alice had written, I was led to hope my prayers and distress might procure me the commiseration necessary to save me from death.

On this slender hope I relied, and endured the incessant rain, and saw the clouds gather round me for a storm, when I quitted my tedious vehicle, without fear of being longer exposed to them than while I was slowly passing the six intermediate miles. The evening shut in with an awful horror I had never seen:—it grew, in an instant, dark:—the clouds flew to elicit lightning;—the thunder seemed to be literally ‘above, about, *and* underneath:’—it was an universal echo. No shelter was near me; the rain came down in torrents: the birds, disturbed from the neighbouring trees, fluttered round my head in giddy panic, and all nature seemed at war, when, to my inexpressible consternation, I found myself entering a brook, the bridge over which I had in the dreary gloom missed.

This proof that I had lost my way, and the doubt whether I could recover it while I had strength

strength to pursue it, intirely dispirited me. In the impiety of anguish, I remember, I said to myself, that Providence had pointed out an end to my calamities, by leading me, as it were blindfold, to the water; and then, without one thought that was not desperation, regardless of the criminality of finishing my own existence, and preventing that of another, I plunged into the liquid element.

I retain no recollection of any sensation but horror when I was sinking. The violence with which I dashed in, made me float instantly to the surface: the current was rapid; it bore me down with it; and presently I felt my feet strike against something which stopped my passage. I now tried to save myself, and perceived that the power I had so dishonoured, had providentially interposed to rescue me. The foot-bridge was overflowed, the rapid stream had carried me upon it, the supports to a hand-rail had obstructed my floating farther, and I was in the place I had sought. I easily recovered my standing: the thunder had ceased; but the rain and lightning continued: the clouds however were not so murky, and in less than an hour I had the comfort of seeing a light in a house, and of discovering that it was at my father's.

Gratitude

Gratitude to heaven for my deliverance, sentiments of sincere contrition for my presumptuous sins, and vows of future obedience, occupied me till now; but when I saw my father's cottage, when I considered that I was an alien from it, and perhaps never to re-enter it, overpowered by fear and shame, I could scarcely impel my feet towards it. At last I reached the door, and, as if all the universe had conspired to drive me from it, the storm came on again at the instant with ten-fold fury. I knocked, and heard a voice, which I knew to be my eldest brother's, ask, Who is there?—I repeated my name, and begged him to save me from sinking to the earth, by immediately admitting me. He drew nearer to the door, and in a tone more tremendous than the thunder that was rattling round me, he refused me, saying my father had forbid it, if ever I returned.

After this, all my prayers obtained no answer: the chill of death seemed spread over me, when turning my eyes in this abyss of misery, as if demanding succour of the jarring elements, I saw the manor-house at a distance, and lights in the upper rooms. Surely, said I to myself, Mrs. Alice, however cruel and mercenary she may have been when she thought me in prosperity, will pity me in my distress. With this
dubious

dubious hope, I bent my course, over the deluged fields, towards the once delightful abode of all my pleasures, urging myself to the haste I could ill make, by the apprehension, that, as it was some time since the church-clock struck eleven, all the house might be in bed before I reached it. I rang the bell at the gate so often without effect, that had my sufferings been in any degree less than they were, my patience would have been exhausted. At length a man, a stranger to me, came with a lantern, and seeing I was not a person whose appearance entitled me to this irregularity, he roughly questioned me. Too faint almost to speak, I begged him to tell Mrs. Alice, that a young woman to whom she had once been kind, requested to speak to her. It was not probable that she would come through the storm to me; I was suffered to follow the man up to the house, and into one of the passages.

By the noise and riot I heard on entering, I imagined the family was down, and I feared this would compel Mrs. Alice to refuse me the shelter I sought, if not to deny her knowledge of me; but she soon condescended to come out to me. My tears drowned my voice, and she pettishly, and as if I was a stranger, bid me tell my business, as she had company in the next room,

room, and could not leave them long. As briefly as I could, I told my woes, and begged to be protected for the night; when with the haughty air that I had before seen her assume, she answered, that her master and lady were at Bath, and she could not *take people* into their house. I, piqued to the soul at this formal cruelty, grew more urgent, on which she bid me be gone, and not by my clamour alarm her friends. Very creditable truly, said the barbarous woman, would it be for me, while I have the management here, to harbour *runaway prostitutes*?—She then called the man who had let me in: he conducted me to the gate, and drove me from it.

Borne down by weariness, faintness, and the most extreme afflictions, I wished only that my feet might support me again to my father's door, there to yield up the small remains of my vital existence. This desired spot I gained, and laid myself on the ground, in speechless agony, hoping that every flash of the lightning, which was still vivid, would strike me.

I had not remained long thus, when I heard some one coming quickly towards me, and who in a voice I knew, but could not recollect, said, Why do you not answer? Who is it that groans so? I raised my head, and saw a light

approach me. The person came up to me, laid hold on my arm, and his next words brought him to my remembrance as Mr. Melros.

All my sufferings were at this moment absorbed in the deepest shame. I endeavoured to hide my face, and to sink again to the earth; but he saying, Is it possible any being can exist in so wretched a situation? called my brother, bid him open the door, and without discovering who I was, took me in his arms, and carried me in. His astonishment when he recognized me, and when my brother confirmed what he could scarcely believe, by saying I had been at the door an hour before, you must conceive, if you would have an idea of it: I cannot describe that, or the mercy he shewed in speaking tenderly to me. When I was able to recal my memory, and to consider my situation, I found myself in bed, and my sister sitting by me, crying bitterly.

Excessive fatigue, to which all passions will yield, procured me sleep, and I know little of what passed till the next day at noon, when Mr. Melros sent to know if I would see him. With my kind sister's help I rose, and my cloaths being now dried, put them on, but my joints were stiffened, and I could only lie on the bed. Mr. Melros came to me when I was ready to receive

receive him, and in a voice and manner ill agreeing, for he spoke sternly, and the tears stood in his eyes, he questioned me as to the cause of my return, and the place I came from. The few words I could articulate, scarcely informed him. I ventured to name my father, and in convulsive incoherence asked if I might appear on my knees before him. Mr. Melros shook his head. I lifted up my hands in dumb supplication: he rose, and turning from me, said, Dorothy, you have broke your father's heart—you must never see him. I came here last night with little hope of finding him alive: the short time he is spared must be otherwise employed than in thinking of you.

My tears will entirely efface what I have written—I must desist abruptly.

DOROTHY MELROS.

LETTER XCIII.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

Vale-Oser, 27th July.

I CAN compare myself to nothing so fitly as to a shop-keeper in one of the noisy streets in London. For the first week after he begins trade there, he is deafened by the perpetual clamour of carts and coaches passing by; but in a little time he grows accustomed to it, and then it is only the casual comers that cannot hear. I was at first distracted by the uproar of this house; but now I seem to have joined it, and am no longer sensible of it. I cannot say indeed, that this is the sort of life I should chuse; but it is such as I can relish. If we do not lead the *vie du berger*, it must be confessed, that we are skilled in the *sçavoir vivre*.

In this irregularity, epistolary negligence is a sin of comparatively so small consideration, that it would seem hypocrisy, or squeamishness, to apologise for it. While I am at hostilities with reason and all her adherents, to attend to punctilios would have the air of absurdity. But negligence towards Mrs. Thirpley, as it includes

cludes ingratitude, can in no situation be a venial fault. If I *coin* time to write, she must be written to.

Since I have been here, Mrs. Melros has, in part, performed a promise I obtained from her, to give me a relation of the events of her life. I have already received five long letters from her, and glad should I be to communicate them to you; but that I reveal them to no one, is the condition on which she indulges me. I shall, however, try to prevail on her to make an exception in your favour; and if she does not, I shall conclude, it is because she does not know you as well as I do.

Lady Porthurst writes to lady Helen, but does not mention any time for their proposing to sail, nor for my father's leaving them: by consequence, I am quite ignorant about my return to Ashholm. As my going thither would silence Mrs. Melros's correspondence, I do not yet wish it; and indeed, after the gaiety of this house, I fear I should think my own situation gloomy. You see how soon one's mind is depraved. Formerly I could devise no greater pleasure, than sitting on the edge of the canal in a summer evening, and enjoying the fragrant air and a book, and now I am all for *al fresco* balls, evening serenades, and music-parties on

the river. This evening, if the weather favours us, we are to have a little *regatta* on a large piece of water near us, and we are promised, for to-morrow, the band of a militia-regiment to follow us up the Medway by moonlight. A dance which is preparing for us at a friend of the colonel's, is to conclude the evening. I live as idly as a Venetian, and shall dance myself to a skeleton.

Lady Helen sends to me for my opinion of *the congruity* of pink and pale blue. A business so important must be my excuse for hastily subscribing myself,

Your

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

L E T T E R X C I V .

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. MELROS.

27th July.

DEAR MADAM,

ENCIRCLED as I am here by whatever can barricade the access to the heart, I have yet found leisure, and not been able to resist the inclination, to weep over your melancholy
pages.

pages. Such of your misfortunes as I am hitherto acquainted with, demand universal pity; in me they excite every sensation that composes friendship, and I shall look on myself as a highly-favoured being, if I am enabled and permitted to cheer the future years of your life.

The sympathetic pensive pleasure I have experienced in the perusal of your letters, is, I confess, not so great as it might be, and it is a wish to improve it, that urges me now to apply to you. 'Tis true, I may be called unreasonable and ungrateful to ask more, after you have taken, and have promised to take, so much trouble in the gratification of my curiosity; but as I have never been accustomed to disguise my sentiments, I believe I am too apt to declare my wishes. The alloy mixed with the pleasure you send me, consists in this:—From the time of my earliest remembrance, openness and candor towards my known friends was inculcated on me. It is impossible, and would be improper for me to exercise this ingenuousness, in its full extent, towards my father:—the trifles of female youth are beneath the cognisance of a father. Had Heaven spared my mother, to her, such as she is described to me, I would have been on all occasions unre-served; and, as this blessing was denied me,

Mrs. Thirpley became her representative, and has ever been the depository of my counsels. I told her you had promised me the narrative I am partially in possession of; and now that I see its power of interesting, and its importance, it would give me great concern to be forced to deny her a share in the pleasure it has given me, and to tell her, there is a point on which her experienced fidelity is not to be trusted. Let me then, my dear madam, intreat you to allow this, and no farther communication, under the security of my positive assurance, that Mrs. Thirpley, the dear, the estimable guide of my youth, has a mind so truly liberable, affections so tender, and a heart so invariably upright, that your confidence cannot be better placed in any one. Consider, she formed me to what I am; and you trust *me*. As the copy seldom equals the original, is she not as fit to be trusted? Indulge me, I beseech you, in this, and I will pledge myself for your having no cause to repent it.

It is, as yet, impossible for me to fix any time for my return to Ashholm. Till your narrative closes, I shall not suffer myself to grow impatient, though, I believe, when I come to you, I shall have been pretty well surfeited with joys, and harrassed by exertions of my animal spirits. Be this as it may, I am
certain

certain the possession of your confidence will make me meet you with increased delight.

I wish you had happened to have come to Ashholm while Mrs. Thirpley was with me. What an agreeable trio we should have made ! Here is vanity ! you will cry. Well, instead of looking back and repining at the lateness of my acquaintance with you, I will rejoice that I found you *so* early, and look forward to years of pleasure and innocent amusements. We will read every thing that can instruct or delight us ; we will transmit monuments of our industry to posterity, and ply the harpsicord till the keys are worn away. All this shall beguile our time when together, and when chill winter, and the arbitrary deity, Fashion, force me to join the throng of London, I can still visit you at Hampstead, and cherish our fortuitous acquaintance.

I shall be heartily angry with myself if I find, when I return to my father's, that you have injured your health by indulging me. For my sake, dear madam, take care of it, and do me the justice to rank me as

Your obliged and very sincere friend,

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER XCV.

MRS. MELROS TO MISS BELVEDERE.

OF the occurrences of the succeeding twenty-four hours, I can render no account. My sister told me I had been delirious, and I felt grateful to the Deity I had offended, for his mercy in restoring my intellects. I begged Mr. Melros might be sent for, as I was now able to speak, though in a whisper, articulately.

You will wonder, my dear madam, at my confidence in applying to one towards whom, next to Heaven and my parents, I had been most culpable. I had no capacity of judging. I knew only that Mr. Melros could assist me, and that no one else could; and, in the most abject humiliation of heart, I had no thought of the opinion formed of me.

Mr. Melros came to me. I again enquired after my father and mother, and was by degrees informed, that my mother had been dead two months, and, that my father's extreme distress of mind had brought him on the verge of the grave, into which he was so fast precipitating, that it was thought he could not live
a week.

a week. All this direful news I heard without injury to my reason. My tears befriended me, and I begged Mr. Melros to endeavour at procuring for me the consolation of seeing this wretched parent before he expired. My own life, I firmly believed, would not be longer than his, and to die in his pardon was all I asked. Moved by my extreme distress, Mr. Melros promised to mention me, if I would furnish him with any satisfactory particulars of my course of life during my absence, and the true reason of my return.

My will to be ingenuous exceeded my power. It was with the utmost difficulty I recounted what had passed before my flight to London, and during my continuance there. One particular alone I concealed; not because I wished it concealed, but because I could not divulge it. Into a mother's ear, I perhaps could have poured this fatal secret; but not all my miseries could conquer this natural reluctance, and I left it to the eyes of those who should see me, after I had left my bed, to discover what my heart and tongue refused to dictate or disclose. Excepting this, Mr. Melros knew now the whole of my misfortunes and my errors. He blamed me; but it was with merciful severity. He pointed out to me the original imprudence

of the path by which I had chosen to avoid him; yet he had so much candor as to accuse himself of being, in some measure, the cause of my transgressions. He commended my returning, and cheered me, as much as I could be cheered, by bidding me look to him for every assistance he was capable of giving me.

He left me, and went to my father, with whom, he gave me his word to be my immediate intercessor. My heart throbbed with palpitations of hope and dread. One moment I persuaded myself, that pity and parental tenderness would aid me; the next, I, with much more reason, despaired of the success of my petition. Thus was my weak frame tortured, when my sister came to me in haste, and, giving me a note, said a gentleman waited for an answer to it. The superscription told me its author, and I was at no loss to guess who was the messenger. I had never suspected that Mr. Smith would follow me; but he had done so, and this billet, I inferred, was a request to be admitted to me. This was conjecture; for had the possession of peace depended on it, I could not have opened it, nor could I at that instant judge what was fittest for me to do.

Unwilling as I was to disturb Mr. Melros in the good work^k he was about, I was forced to
adopt

adopt my sister's proposal of calling him. She, poor girl, saw my distress, but could not devise the cause: she knew only, that in similar perturbation, I had applied to him, and she fetched him. I put the note, unopened, into his hand. He read the few lines, and briefly told me their contents, by saying, Mr. Smith insisted on seeing me; and asking me if I was willing to admit him. I replied, as strongly as I could, in the negative; for, dearly as I still loved him, duty was now uppermost and victorious in my mind.—The refusal had but just left my lips, when he, fired by impatience, rushed into the room, and catching my hand, cried out:—O my Dorothy, how could you be so hasty?—We are not ruined:—my father has heard of you;—we have been betrayed; but I have yet friends. I will marry you immediately, and we may be happy.

Not at all encouraged by this consolation, nor flattered by a hope which I knew too well had its foundation in a desperate resolution to save me, I would to his assertion that we might be happy, have replied—Never, never; but my strength utterly failed me, and I neither saw nor heard him more.

This accident threw me into a fever, in which I continued a fortnight. At every transient

sient visitation of my reason, my sorrows rushed on my recollection, and threw me back into delirium. At the end of three weeks, I was out of danger, and could make feeble enquiries of Mr. Melros about my father. He would tell me nothing, and from this I foreboded that he was dead: if he had refused my prayer, still Mr. Melros would have comforted me that he was alive; and if he had granted it, the same humanity that had visited my bed of sickness, and stopped my fleeting soul, would have given me the cheering intelligence. By anticipating the shock, I prevailed on Mr. Melros to let me know the truth. He confessed that I was an orphan; but assured me my father had died in peace with me; that he had repeatedly declared his forgiveness of me, and had so far interested himself in my future welfare, as to advise me on no consideration to marry Mr. Smith, if his friends opposed it. My kind advocate was furnished with the arguments on which my father founded his opinion; but they were needless. To perform one act of duty to a parent, whom my misconduct had hurried to his grave, was an opportunity so valuable, that had the advice been ever so contrary to my nature, I should unhesitatingly have followed it. In the present instance, it accorded with my disposition

disposition to submit. My regard for Mr. Smith was great as ever ; but to have launched into the wide ocean of the world again with him, however our connexion might be sanctified, seemed to me a resumption of sin, and I abhorred the thoughts of that situation to which all my wishes, a few months before, had tended.

The die was cast, and I now had neither hope nor fear to agitate me. I rose from my sick bed, scarcely an existing creature ; a deep melancholy succeeded to the perturbations I had suffered under ; I felt completely wretched, and without a wish to be otherwise.

A letter from Mr. Smith, which Mr. Melros had kept till I could safely read it, awakened me from my torpid state. In it he earnestly conjured me to tell him what would most conduce to my peace. He wished, he said, that the means I pointed out might include the completion of our union ; and he urged me, by every consideration of love for him, regard to myself, and justice to a creature not yet called into being, to turn my views towards this conclusion of our sufferings. At the same time he professed to leave me wholly at liberty, and to refer himself to my decision.

I had found that, after Mr. Smith's visit to me, no circumstance of my aggravated wretchedness

edness was unknown to Mr. Melros, and I therefore made no scruple of shewing him the letter as soon as I had read it. He certainly expected me now to waver; but I was firm in my resolution of renouncing Mr. Smith, and, at intervals, as my imperfect strength would permit, I wrote my final determination. In a hand which his attention had frequently been employed to improve — in language I had learned of him, I frankly told him it was out of his power to restore my mind to calmness; and, against internal conviction, I persuaded him, that time and solitude might do it. I told him what a friend I had in Mr. Melros, and I endeavoured, in spite of myself, to convince him I was not wretched. As to my future plan of life, in the divine allotment I still dared to take a share, and in supine confidence, or rather desperate carelessness, here I rested.

Shortly after, and at my very earnest intreaty, Mr. Smith married the lady whose situation had ruined mine. He had, before this, engaged his father to pity me, on condition of his abandoning me, and had obliged me to accept an annuity equal to the value of the income on which we had built our unstable hopes.

Mr. Melros was my guardian, my counsellor, and director in all my affairs; and as I was
very

very earnest to remove from a place I was so well known in, before my mysterious story was unravelled, or the village curiosity excited, he suffered an opinion to prevail, that I was gone to service in London, and privately conveyed me to a house he had taken for me in the metropolis of the next county; whither I went, under the name of Smith, and the character of a widow.

It was in this place, that a living *memento* of my sins and follies first racked my soul with the contending passions of love and shame. Here too, I became accidentally acquainted with major Melros, the son of my reverend friend; and here, not deterred by knowing every circumstance of my errors, he, after some months, married me, and, by every possible act of generosity, endeavoured to obliterate my misfortunes, and the remembrance of them.

My enjoyments, if it is not profaning the word to appropriate it, were less durable than the memory of my sorrows. The death of Mr. Melros, the untimely fall of my husband, and the loss of two of my children, were strokes of fate I could ill bear, though, I hope they increased my submission to the powerful hand that so justly chastised me.

Thus,

Thus, my dear madam, have I related, and I fear tediously, the events of an obscure life. When you find yourself disposed to commiserate my sufferings, turn your eyes towards the cause of them, and think, that, but for myself, I might have been happy.

Under the full persuasion that you will do nothing that is not perfectly right, and strongly impressed by your commendation of your friend, Mrs. Thirpley, I consent to extend the perusal of these papers to her, at the same time, I must remind you, it is the greatest concession you can ask of me. I long to have you here again, and to be assured that, though you now know how small are my pretensions, you will yet allow me to be

Your most obliged,

and obedient humble servant,

DOROTHY MELROSE.

L E T T E R X C V I .

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

MY DEAR MADAM,

THE inclosed packet contains Mrs. Melros's letters, which I have her permission to suffer you to see. They are too important to be trusted by common carriage; the bearer is a friend of colonel Branlyffe's, and his affairs will detain him a few days in your neighbourhood. He has obligingly offered to re-convey the papers to me, and, if it suits your convenience, I shall thank you to return them to him. At all events, remember no one is to see their contents, besides yourself.

When you have read the manuscript, I hope you will feel, as I do, inclined to sink her errors in her sufferings. I could like very much to ask for a little farther information; but curiosity, after she has deliberately revealed what she thought proper, would be scarcely innocently indulged. I want sadly to know what became of her first child, whether it is living, or was one of the two that died; but I will put no more questions to her.

I have

I have had a letter from my father, in which he says, he purposes being at home in about ten days, and will send for me. I shall, after all, be glad to get there; for my spirits are hardly equal to the velocity with which I move in this giddy vortex. I had flattered myself, that lady Helen, would have been ready to go with me; but she does not think it will be possible, without displeasing lady Lucy, who cannot bear being without company in the house, and has at present no supply, for all the world is at the sea.

Accept a short adieu, and as short compliments to Mr. Thirpley.

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER XCVII.

MRS. THIRPLEY TO MISS BELVEDERE.

Norwich, 9th August, 1787.

MY DEAR LOVE,

I AM infinitely indebted to your benevolent desire, that I should partake of every species of your pleasures. I have had time sufficient

to

to read Mrs. Melros's melancholy tale, and to return it to the gentleman who did me the favour of bringing it. What this poor lady has suffered, certainly entitles her to all the pity she can meet with: she has mine most sincerely.

You derive an advantage, my dear, from the place in which you became acquainted with Mrs. Melros, as it allows you to indulge, in her favour, your natural disposition to compassionate and relieve the distressed of every one; but had you first known her in London, you would have found it difficult to establish an intimacy with her. However relaxed the manners of the present age may be, there is one point on which we seem to have decided with a stoical severity:—this is, that innocence and frailty, be the former ever so secure, or the latter ever so completely obliterated, must not come into the contact of friendship. In your privacy at Ashholm, and under the sanction of your father, this rigid law may be, in this one instance, dispensed with, without offending the legislature of decorum, and, I hope, without injury to the purity of your mind, provided you do not, in your commiseration, lose sight of the one great error that occasioned all the mischief you lament. You may even make the connexion useful to you, (and then, you know I shall

heartily

heartily approve it,) if you extract its proper moral from Mrs. Melros's narrative. You see in it the importance of a first deviation, and the fatal tendency of self-confidence. Her positive final ruin may be dated from her resolution to carry the news of her intended submission *herself*, to her insidious friend. Had she sent an excuse for her absence, she had probably escaped; for, if I can see at all into her heart, she is now of opinion, that to have married in obedience to her father, would have been a less evil than that she fell into. After all that can be said about forced matches, a parent, whose conduct has steadily indicated right affections, may, nine times in ten, be trusted to dispose of a child. There is great truth, as well as good sense, in those words which Metastasio has put in the mouth of Mandane, when she excuses her father's rigor:—

Chi sa, se a forza

Non simuli ferezza, e che in segreto,

Pietoso 'l genitore,

Forse non disapprove il suo rigore?

It must, however, be confessed, that Mrs. Melros's father was injudicious in the means he chose to effect his purpose by. To be terrified into a marriage, or driven to it out of regard
to

to another, is not the most expedient method of procuring happiness. Your friend's temper might have been *coaxed* into compliance, but never forced into it. You remember, my dear, you once said, Caroline of Lichtfield, that perfect model of innocence and simplicity, would not have run away, if Walsstein had been presented to her in a less formally alarming manner.

I commend your forbearance of any farther enquiry. Mrs. Melros must have suffered pitifully in retracing, as she has done, all her sorrows: it must now be your business to compose her mind after it. Do me the favour to present my compliments and thanks to her, for the obligation she confers on me, in the extension of her confidence, and to assure her she risks nothing by it. That you may long enjoy the pleasure of her friendship, and avail yourself of her experience, is very sincerely
 with of

Your affectionate

ANNE THIRPLEY,

LETTER

LETTER XCVIII.

CAPTAIN MELROS TO MISS BELVEDERE.

Asbholm-common, 10th August.

MADAM,

SLIGHT as is my acquaintance with you, I ought to apologize for the liberty I take of addressing you; but the emergency on which I write, must stand me in stead of an apology. I came here, a few days ago, to see my mother, and found her in tolerable health; but yesterday she was indisposed, and is to-day so much worse, that I am alarmed for her. As I am ignorant of any connexions she may have made in the neighbourhood, I am at a loss whom to apply to; but a wish she has often this morning uttered, that miss Belvedere were at home, has pointed out you, madam, to me, as capable of directing me. I believe it is not at present necessary to request your return: should she grow worse, I may be compelled to it; but, as yet, a line from you, telling me what physician I had best send for, and whether there is any female friend near her, whose attention I can properly call on, is all I need ask.

You

You will pardon this intrusion on your engagements and pleasures, when you think of the motive I obey. It is a liberty I the less reluctantly assume, as it gives me an occasion of subscribing myself, madam,

Your most obedient humble servant,

PHILIP MELROS.

C. H. T. T. I

LETTER XCIX.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

Vale Ofier, 11th August.

I AM going home immediately. Captain Melros has written to tell me his mother is ill, and she wishes to see me. Colonel Branlyffe's carriage is getting ready to take me, and I hope to reach Ashholm before dark. Oh! if Mrs. Melros is in danger, what suffering is preparing for your poor Gertrude! Lady Helen will write to lady P. and, by that channel, my father will know of my removal. I cannot suppose I shall have leisure or inclination to write myself, if this dear woman is very ill. I do not intend to come back here, even if she

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recovers

recovers immediately; so that, till you hear farther, you may direct to Ashholm. The chaise is ready, and I am going. Adieu.

G. B.

LETTER C.

MISS BELVEDERE TO LADY HELEN STORFORD.

12th August.

YOUR kind injunction, my dear lady Helen, shall be obeyed; and I will, fatigued and anxious as I am, force my pen to tell you I arrived here safe, and before the evening grew dark. Colonel B's servants observed his directions to make all possible haste with me, and I think myself very much indebted to his kindness.

Mrs. Melros is indeed very ill, and I have great apprehensions for her; but the physician condemns my fears, and bids me rest assured that she is in no danger. He may be right; but the eye of friendship is keener even than that of experience, and I see a shocking alteration in her.

her. She was wonderfully rejoiced at my arrival, though, in fact, all the advantage she can derive from my coming, is ideal; for, by letter, I could have answered the captain's queries, and his attention supercedes all my care. I will, however, fancy myself of use, and hope, that whatever cheers her mind, may assist her health. God grant it may in some way be speedily restored!—Forgive me for entertaining you no better: my heart is so oppressed with fear and weariness, that I am half stupified.

Pray make my very grateful acknowledgments to the colonel and lady Lucy, for all their goodness to me. I am sure my father will be equally desirous with myself, of returning a part of their civilities, if they will honour us with their company. Believe me, my dear friend,

Your faithful

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER CI.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

Ashholm, 27th August.

AT half past one, this morning, the awful scene closed, and my dear Mrs. Melros breathed 'the sigh that is repeated no more.'—May God, of his infinite mercy, take away my life, rather than condemn me again to undergo the agony I felt for twelve hours preceding this sad event!—I have seen death in all its terrors. It is not true, that

- 'To die, is landing on some silent shore,
- 'Where billows never break, nor tempests roar;
- 'Ere well we feel the friendly stroke, 'tis o'er.'

It is launching, in a fragile bark, on a tempestuous ocean:—it is to be driven on in dread and horror:—it is to feel every comfort give way at once:—it is to look round, in agony, and find no help nor relief.

Words, my dear, my only bosom-friend, can convey to you no idea of the misery I have witnessed. I came here on the day I wrote you word I was leaving the Vale, and I found Mrs. Melros very much distressed with spasms in her
side

side and stomach ; but she had intervals of ease, and, I flattered myself, was cheered by seeing me. I immediately sent for Dr. —, and he gave me very comfortable hopes, that she would soon be relieved ; but almost as soon as he was gone, she was again attacked more violently than before, and I saw a remarkable alteration in her. Her son, whom I found here, saw it as well as myself ; yet still Dr. — assured us for several days, that there was no probable danger. I was not to be persuaded into this belief. I knew her constitution could not now be strong, and had about me a sort of prescience that this was to be the final conflict. Ever since last Friday, which is now six days, she had symptoms of death on her, and yet the physician would have flattered her and us. Can there be greater cruelty, than thus to deceive a being on the confines of eternity ?

On Saturday, much against her consent, for she was firmly of opinion that she could not recover, I sent to town for Dr. R—, and requested, before I called on the other to meet him, that he would tell me what he thought of my friend's case. With that tender caution that is, if possible, more dreadful than a sudden shock, as it implies deliberate judgment,

and precludes the hope of error, he told me her recovery could not be effected by any thing less than a miracle. She might live a few days, but they would be few. She might, he added, have some temporary ease, and he advised my availing myself of the earliest opportunity to warn her of her approaching change.

Little information of this sort was necessary. The dear sufferer had long anticipated her present state, and I had only to be silent in my expressions of hope, to declare my sentiments. Her son, whose assiduity and filial love nothing I can say can do justice to, was, as much as myself, an enemy to this wicked species of imposition; and when she next, as she did very frequently assured us that our trouble was vain, we suffered dumb sorrow to indicate our thoughts.

After this, I endeavoured to calm my incessantly beating bosom, and to console captain Melros, by persuading myself, and pledging myself, that, as her strength decreased, her sufferings would abate; and that, in all human probability, she would resign her breath with the gentleness of a new-born infant. But how was I deceived! As her end approached, she became confused, alarmed, and dejected. A restlessness, such as I had no idea of, succeeded. She was, for three hours in the next day, speechless,

less, and we began to fear it would be a violent struggle. All Sunday night she raved dreadfully, and in terms that, had I not known the events of her life, would have been wholly unintelligible to me, as, to my astonishment, I found they were to her son. I thought it would be prudent to keep him from her while she was divested of caution, as what she said, if he at all understood it, might make him unhappy all his life, to prevent which, it occurred to me, she had kept him in greater ignorance than myself. I therefore prevailed on the captain to leave her, on a promise that when she was calm, he should be called to her. I ordered a field-bed for myself into the room, and sent for my own maid. These precautions I soon rejoiced in having taken; for those about Mrs. Melros could only suppose her frantic, when she talked of her father, and his dying. She was every moment begging his forgiveness; but what not even *I* can account for, is her as often mentioning *my* father, and calling to him to save her.

Monday and Tuesday she continued in such evident agony of mind and body, that we dreaded positive insanity; and now, instead of praying for her life, we asked only that she might be removed gently. At noon, on Wed-

nesday, she grew easy, and was quite sensible, but exhausted by the excessive perturbation of the former days. Towards the evening, she seemed to recover, and begged me to read to her. I did so;—she talked a good while with the captain, and, about nine o'clock, he told me she had expressed a desire to have the last offices of religion she might probably ever assist at, properly performed. He went immediately to our new rector, who came instantly, and did his duty with seriousness and piety. After this, we thought her more composed; but her head soon rambled again, and she talked of my father, and said she had something to say to him. That she should live till he could come, was not to be expected; but I offered to write, and send an express with all possible speed, in hopes of meeting him on the road. She said—No; it is too late. I promised to report faithfully whatever she would give me in charge; but she would not tell me what it was, nor do I believe her son knows. Is it not very odd, that she should have dwelt so on my father, when, by all I ever learnt from her, she had but a very slight acquaintance with him, and they have never met since she came here?

Soon after the time I am speaking of, she called her son and me to her, and sent every
body

body else out of hearing. I imagined she was desirous of revealing some important secret, and I am still persuaded such was her intention; for she began with saying, the circumstances under which she laboured, the terror that haunted her, and the probable consequences that she foresaw, would, she trusted, excuse, if not justify her departure from a promise she had once made.—We were all attention; but she disappointed us, and began to talk incoherently of *concealment, imprudence, nice reputation*, and I cannot remember what beside. She then suddenly started, and said to me,—My dear love, Philip is your brother.—She at that moment, I imagine, took me for some one else, and I asked her if she supposed me her daughter. O no, no, she replied, I am not so happy—you are no relation to me. This convinced me it was only delirium; but the captain thinks she meant that he would recompense my attachment to her, by exercising a brotherly regard towards me.

In this unintelligible way she talked till about eleven o'clock, when, on a sudden, she again grew rational, and desired to be left with me. She then, in the clearest and most pathetic language, described to me the state of her mind, telling me, she suffered infinitely more than she

had ever dreaded ; that she was deceived in her hope of finding peace at the last ; for the terrors of her conscience were in themselves as great as ever, and aggravated by seeing her prospect of future penitence and atonement withdrawn. It was a sight too shocking for humanity to support, to see her stretched on the bed she was never to rise from, racked by pain, and enervated to a degree of helplessness, while the tears glided down her cheeks, and the most penitential contrition was engraven on her countenance. Even in her last moments thoughtful for me, she saw she afflicted me insupportably, and endeavoured to disguise her pangs by checking her utterance ; but the groans she could not suppress, pierced me to the heart ; and fearful that she would deprive her son of the last comfort he could receive in the sight of her, I begged I might call him in. She did not oppose it. I told her when he was come ; she gave him her blessing ; and the last sensible words she pronounced were thanks for my attachment to her. She exhausted what remained of her strength in attempting to get from her bed of nettles, as she called it, and being prevented by us, she sunk down, and in one deep sigh expired.

O ! my dear madam, what would I not have given at that moment to have followed her ?

Anxiety

Anxiety for her was now over, and my thoughts turned inward. I believe a being more completely wretched than myself, at that instant, was not, is not to be found. I loved her, tho' but for a short time, as if she had been my mother; and, in losing her, I felt all the loss of a parent. What then were the feelings of her son! Nature here abetted the cruel stroke, and he had two affections to struggle against—his love for her as her son, his compassion for her as a fellow-creature. But he bore it up with fortitude, and suppressing the grief that demanded utterance, he turned from the senseless corpse to recover me almost as senseless.

Had this unfortunate woman been blessed with quietness in her last moments; had the grave concealed its terrors, or the Almighty's mercy appeared to counterbalance them, I could have resigned her without agony; but to see her suffer as she did, to find her at last disappointed in her hope of a calm exit, was more affecting than even her death. And what a terrifying lesson her fate holds out! If a penitence of so many years will not atone for the error of a few months, how can I, how can any one expiate a life of what is called innocent trifling? Is not the *waste* of years in itself highly criminal?—and who can promise

himself one single day to say, I have sinned—and to begin an atonement for his sins?

Poor captain Melros is at the desolate house by himself;—a melancholy situation, and as yet I have not been able to relieve it. I intend to send to him this morning, to know if it would be agreeable to him to meet our rector here at dinner. Alone, I cannot properly see him. O how I wish my father was come home! I believe it will not be long before he comes.

Adieu, my dear friend: let me have the consolation of hearing from you, for I know you sympathize in the sorrow of your

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER CII.

LADY HELEN STORFORD TO MISS BELVEDERE.

Vale Ofier, 27th August.

MY DEAR BELLA,

WE have been excessively shocked just now by hearing of the death of captain Melros's mother, and as you were so attached to her,

her, we fear greatly for you, in your melancholy situation. The colonel and lady Lucy commission me to beg you to return hither. Your sorrow and solitude will certainly hurt your health. Branlyffe writes to poor captain Melros, to make the same request. Will this be an inducement with you? We all think it will. I write in haste; but am, nevertheless, my dear Bella's ever faithful

H. STORFORD.

LETTER CIII.

MISS BELVEDERE TO LADY HELEN
STORFORD.

Aspbelm, 28th August.

MY dear lady Helen is very good to allow me a place in her thoughts, and still more kind in interesting herself for my welfare. As I have every reason to believe colonel and lady Lucy Branlyffe desirous to shew me friendship, I should unhesitatingly accept their invitation, if I stood in need of such relief; but my mind at present would not bear change of place, and of my solitude I have no reason to complain,
for

for my father has sent me word that he will be at home to-morrow.

You do me, my dear, unintentional injustice in supposing I shall be particularly attracted to the Vale, by the promise of seeing captain Melros there. I would rather shun him. The scene we have gone through together would be revived by our meeting, and it would retard the recovery of both. His mother was so dear to me, that I feel her loss severely; and as I have not his fortitude, it would be cruel to remind him of his misfortune.

I am little disposed to write. My head aches whenever I fix my attention. This, and not any failure of respect, is the reason I add no more, than my thanks and compliments to your kind friends. Think me, at all times, and under all circumstances, your

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER CIV.

MRS. THIRPLEY TO MISS BELVEDERE.

Norwich, 30th August.

HAD I not found you, my dearest love, always willing to hear me, I should forbear writing till I thought your grief old enough to bear consolation. The affliction you have suffered is, to a mind like your's, one of the most pungent you can feel. I share it with you, and I know how it affects you.

To be insensible to misfortune, must have been one of the first wishes for happiness that preceded experience; but it was the wish of ignorance. A small degree of mental culture sufficed to shew, that apathy was not felicity: future discoveries taught that affliction was a salutary severity, and we are now led to believe in the luxury of woe. Here, however, we err as fatally as in the first wish, since this opinion prevents many from exerting those faculties which balance the affections, and inclines them to a sort of criminal self-indulgence, in sinking under the rod of affliction. When our spirits are once considerably depressed, it is much less troublesome to suffer them to remain so, than to strive

strive against the depression ; but if a friend remains for us to cheer, if we have a relative or social duty to discharge, or if we would not incur the displeasure of Him, who will not suffer his blessings to be despised because they are abridged, it behoves us to listen to the voice of reason, and to weigh her dictates against the heresies of weakness.

When my dear Gertrude considers this, she will, I am sure, rally her deserting fortitude. She will look round, and say—How many comforts yet remain to me!—excepting the recent wound in my mind, which all-efficacious Time will certainly cure, I am in no worse a situation than before I knew Mrs. Melros. Let me compare my cause of grief with the many sorrows she bore, and I shall see abundant reason to be grateful.

Your grief, my love, I acknowledge has one aggravation, not common in such cases. Mrs. Melros's sufferings, at the close of her life, must have shocked your tenderness, and made the impression on your mind deep indeed ; yet even this will admit of being soothed. It pleased her Creator, in his secret wisdom, to call her to himself in terror ; but this is no argument against his mercy, nor are we to make melancholy inferences from it. A deep sense of sin,
and

and a contrite humility, must, of themselves, naturally produce doubt, and often despair. An extraordinary extension of mercy sometimes interposes to prevent these horrors; but no one has a *claim* to this; and if the privation of it tends to increase the sincerity of repentance, the punishment, though agonising, takes the place, and fulfills the purposes of mercy. Your friend's immortal part might be chastised into fitness for a happy abode. Do not, therefore, look on her amended life as a fruitless work, because you did not see her receive the reward of it; without it, there could have been little hope for her; for, to depend wholly on the efficacy of a postponed repentance, is of all folly and presumption the greatest.

The lesson held out to you, in the melancholy scene you have been called to, is this:—That the sense of guilt is stronger than any other part of the memory;—that at a time when all disguise is seen through, and all worldly palliatives fail, truth must appear in the form we have dressed her in. If we have cloathed her in the garb of innocence, she will bring peace with her; but if we have arrayed her in ghastly colours, if we have put a scourge in her hand, at the hour of death she will terrify and punish us.

I am

I am of your opinion, that the sum total of a life of negligence is as much to be feared in the balance of our great account, as the apparently more ponderous load of casual criminality. I would always have you think it so. There is no better stimulative to active virtue, than to consider active and passive vice, as inimical to our most important enjoyment.

You see, my dear, I not only forbear all reprehension of your sorrow, but all opposition to its continuance. I know very well that the mind, severely shocked, requires a long time to regain its tone. The sympathetic virtues are ornaments of the female character, and your grief is highly laudable. There is but one injunction I lay on you : let each day wear off some particles of your melancholy ; and to this end, strive to decrease it, rather by facing, than shunning it. If you fly from it, it will haunt you whenever you cannot fly ; if you turn on it, you repel it.

The circumstance that will dwell longest with you, is that which terrified you ; but do not let this increase your grief. It would be impiety to attempt your consolation by saying, you have no reason to doubt her happiness ; yet this I will venture to say, that I should feel no additional apprehension from her terrors. In my opinion,

opinion, confidence would have been more dreadful.

That calamity may never come nearer to my dear Gertrude, and that the sense of this may soon leave her in peace, is the earnest prayer of her very tenderly affectionate

ANNE THIRPLEY.

LETTER CV.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

Aspbolm, 30th August.

DEAREST MADAM,

FOR the precarious chance of meeting my father on the road, I sent two messengers, different ways, to prevent his being surpris'd at any alteration in my looks, which our recent misfortune might have occasioned. One was so fortunate as to meet him, and returned to me with the joyful news that he would be with me yesterday evening. Just as I began to fear, from the lateness of the hour, that some unforeseen accident had detained him, he arrived. My heart was so full with what had passed in his absence, that I welcomed him in tears. He forbore reproaching

proaching me, as he justly might, with suffering a foreign cause of sorrow to damp my joy at seeing him: he even seemed to share my grief, and indulged me by talking of my deceased friend, her merits, and her sufferings; but the well-known tenderness of his nature made me brief on the last topic. He asked me if she went off without pain. I shook my head—his eyes filled, and he left me. This sympathy, which I have vanity enough to attribute more to my good father's love to me, than to his regard for Mrs. Melros, of whom he knew less than myself, will go farther towards cheering me, than all the gay amusement in the world.

He is now gone to visit the captain. I urged him to go, rather, I believe, against his judgment; he thought it unfit to disturb him, and would have written; nevertheless, when I said it would oblige me, he was so kind as to comply. I could not tempt captain Melros here, as I intended. I did not indeed expect he would come; but to have omitted asking him, would have appeared negligent and unkind.

One painful truth I must here confess to you, for I have nothing to conceal. I am sorry to perceive that my father did not much approve my being with my deceased friend when the captain

captain was with her, nor much my inviting him to dinner. Yet, on my asking him how, in friendship and civility, I could do less, and on my assuring him I was particularly careful in my conduct to him, and that I would, on no account, have sat down to a *tete-à-tete* dinner with him, he owned I had done no more than was right. And really, on a review of what I did, I cannot discover any thing that I should have thought reprehensible in another. I am sensible, that young and inexperienced as I am, unprotected by a mother's sanction, and so far elevated as to be obnoxious to censure, it is necessary to behave with reserve and circumspection; but, on the other hand, it must be considered, that, without coming a little forwarder than I would do if I had a mother, I cannot discharge the duties of my station. As a girl in her noviciate, I am to retreat; but as the mistress of my father's house, and as one who is sedulous for his reputation, I must advance. I hope he will not leave me again, and that I may have his guidance for my own, and his satisfaction.

31st August.

Visitors hindered me from continuing this yesterday morning. I was ill disposed to receive

ceive them; but as it is no reason for privacy that one has lost a *dear friend*, though the death of a *relation*, even if a stranger, is allowed in etiquette to warrant a denial, I was forced to appear. But do not let me complain away my leisure.

It is determined that Mrs. Melros shall be removed to Hampstead for interment. This I own is proper; but it is not as I wished. I would have had her buried here. My father soon convinced me I was wrong, and I therefore suffered my wishes to reach nobody else. I am almost sorry I could not conceal my grief from him: he takes too great a part in it; indeed I never saw him half so dejected.

Again I must break off—I hear wheels approaching, and the bell at the gate rings violently. 'Tis colonel Branlyffe's coach—lady Helen kisses her hand to me.

1st September.

My kind friends staid here till it was so dark, that I shall be glad to hear they reached home in safety. Their errand was to take me to the Vale; but I begged to be excused. My sweet Helen shewed a truly friendly concern for me, and has promised to oblige me by spending a few days here. To-morrow the remains of my
transiently

transiently known, and yet greatly beloved friend, are to set out for Hampstead, where they will be interred as soon as her son can go thither, which will be in a day or two after, if what she has left to be settled here, can be completed in that time. Till this is all over, I cannot give lady Helen a cheerful reception, on which account it is agreed that her visit shall commence with the next week. By that time I hope I shall be myself again.

It gave me some pain yesterday to hear thoughtless colonel Branlyffe ridicule captain Melros for his attachment to his mother. Nothing we said could dissuade him and lady Lucy from going to the house, on purpose, as he styled it, *to beat up Melros's quarters*. They went, and, to my great joy, were not admitted. Could any folly be worse timed? Lady Helen chose to remain with me, and, I believe, was heartily vexed at the impropriety of their conduct.

My father is still in very low spirits. Lord Porthurst's affairs, he complains, embarrass him very much, and I have a notion his friendship, in that quarter, has been very expensive. Indeed the circumstances that surround him at present, are of themselves enough to deject him. I suppose his mind is in some measure hurt by
his

his dearest friend's being forced to quit the kingdom, and he has nothing to turn to by which he can relieve this uneasiness, for I cannot yet be cheerful; and the whole of his leisure is dedicated to the captain, who is still more melancholy, and looks most shockingly.

Yet, though I say I am not cheerful, do not infer that I have neglected your advice. I have strictly followed, and hope soon to profit by it. I keep myself as busy as I can; but I do not exclude reflection. Farewell. Love me still as

Your

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER CVI.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

3d September.

I CANNOT close the day without writing a little to you; for, after this time, I cannot guess when I shall have another opportunity. On Monday, lady Helen comes, and, if she brings her spirits with her, I am sure I shall not have much vacant time. When her visit is concluded,

concluded, my father says I must think of going to lady Wilnor, as the invitation has been strongly repeated. I have no great desire to go there; but it will be convenient to my father, who is called to town perpetually by lord Port-hurft's teasing affairs. Is it not very hard, that one man is to spend a fortune, and another must settle his accounts? To stay here alone, even if I were allowed to do so, would now be very dreary, and colonel Branlyffe's noisy house would be ten times worse; so I shall go to Ger-vaise. I wish I knew a little more of the persons I am to be a guest to.

Captain Melros dined here to-day, and has taken his leave. We are all, I hope, regaining our vivacity; but the parting was very galling. I was too sincerely affected to be as much a hypocrite as I ought to have been. The recent wound in my heart opens at the slightest motive; and when the captain came up to me to bid me a last adieu, I could answer him no otherwise than by a shower of tears. My father was at this moment absent. Captain Melros asked me if he might hope for my remembrance. I said, Yes, certainly. He was going to say something more, but checked himself suddenly, and went to my father. I saw

no more of him. 'Twas unkind to leave me thus abruptly—we had scarcely said farewell.

I was roused from this new sorrow by my father's expressing himself rather displeased at it. He reminded me, that he had allowed my grief for Mrs. Melros its full scope; but that decorum required me to moderate that for her son's absence. He asked if the captain had seen me in tears. On my saying, he had, he blamed me for having so little command over myself. I now saw to what his enquiries and remonstrances tended, and I hastened to dry my eyes, and to relieve his fears, by assuring him, my present grief was a renewal of that that had for some time hung on me; that it had no particular reference to him I had just parted from; and that I would give him my word, never to do any act that should indicate my having disposed of my affections, without his advice, consent, and approbation. He seemed perfectly satisfied, called me his good girl, and excused his earnestness by saying, that *captain Melros was the last man in the world I ought to think of.*

This prohibition I cannot wholly obey; however, in the way my father meant, I never design to think of him. The idea of the son is connected with that of the mother, and I must change

change my nature before I forget her; but I am sure my father may safely trust me, that I never should, in this instance, pass the limits of friendship, nor breathe a wish towards captain Melros, more than that he may enjoy the happiness I believe he merits.

Adieu, my dear madam. At all events you shall hear from me again before I leave this place.

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER CVII.

LADY LUCY BRANLYFFE TO LADY
HELEN STORFORD.

Vale Oster, September 5th.

DEAR CREATURE,

IF I had known half how uncomfortable I should be without you, not all the Belvederas in the world should have got you from me. In pity, do not stay longer than is absolutely necessary. Your *bourgeoise* friend has her father to comfort her; I have nothing but my husband, and, you know, I may as well have nobody. It is insupportably melancholy.

Branlyffe and I had a tiff in the evening of your departure : what he said, was equally false and foolish, and indeed I believe he was in jest when he began ; but I was determin'd to shew him I would take no such jests, so we went to bed in ill humour, and scarcely spoke next day. He grows every hour more inattentive to me : if he expects me to purchase his smiles by submission, he is woefully mistaken. I think I have sacrificed enough to him. I begin to believe I was very foolish, and am astonished I ever could be charmed with him. Surely he is strangely altered of late. I vow, when I look at him, I can discover nothing to please me ; and yet there was a time when I thought him perfection. Such transformation does matrimony make ! Pray, my dear, take care how you make a choice. By the way, tell me a little about that charming fellow, Melros. Is he moping still ? How stands Belvedera affected ? I dare say you are by this time in her confidence about him. Has she shewn you his letters ? or, does she persist in denying an attachment ? and is your heart at rest on that score ? If it is, and nothing is wanting but putting the gentleman in your way, I will contrive that. He shall be invited here on your return, and if your eyes do not transfix him, I shall

shall say he is not worth the chace:—an opinion, you know, I am not at all inclined to entertain of him.

My gentleman has dined out, twenty miles off. He chose to take four horses, so I am a prisoner; but that is a matter of no importance to him—for I am *his wife*. I suppose he will please to visit home about sun-rise, and, as is growing very much his custom, half tipsy. I shall leave him to enjoy his sobering nap alone. I have had a camp-bed put up in the blue dressing-room, to which I can retire whenever he and his bottle are too great friends. O Helen! how I envy your liberty!—you may look round the world and chuse, while I am daily discovering new sources of uneasiness.

Dear girl, let me have an acre of gossip to amuse me. Tell me every thing that you can collect about yourself, and those you are with, and their connexions; for I have no entertainment of any kind. The newspapers are a day old before I can get them; the magazines this month are all as stupid as so many sermons: I can relish nothing but the reviews, and they are agreeable because they are always ill-natured. Do, dear Helen, tell me all the news, and, above all, when you will return to your disconsolate

LUCY BRANLYFFE.

LETTER CVIII.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

September 10th, 1787.

WHILE lady Helen writes a letter, which she threatens me shall be very short, to lady Lucy Branlyffe, I may say a few words to my dear Mrs. Thirpley. Our plan is settled. Her ladyship stays here only till Monday, and, on Tuesday, my father takes me to sir Tancred's: there he sleeps one night, and the next day goes on to London. As he cannot conveniently return hither soon, I am, when my visit in Suffex is over, to go to town, and remain there during the winter, as usual. Lady Helen goes from hence to colonel Branlyffe's. She will, on a day not yet fixed, call on me at Gervaise, and we are to go to Berkley-square together, as she is to spend some months at our house. How much of this scheme is to take place, time must determine; at present, all parties have agreed.

Lord and lady Porthurst are on their way *into exile*. Lady Helen does not seem to feel it, nor would I have her. We all know 'Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise.' She

is

is extremely kind to me, in endeavouring to render me as thoughtless as herself; but I am of lumpish clay. However, the necessity of amusing her, has done both my father and me good. It would be cruel to make her a partner in our melancholy, and, to avoid this, it must be banished. Her countenance fell a little, or at least I thought so, when I said captain Melros was gone. I fancy she is caught; but I hope not too fast to disentangle herself. I am sure he is one of the last men in the world *she* ought to think on, if it turns out, as is expected, that her rank and person must be her fortune. She could *spend* a fortune with a grace; but to live *without one*, would, I fear, be quite as difficult to her as to other people.

Here she comes—all gaiety and good-humor, even in this comparatively dull place. Your friend, Mrs. Parpen, judged too unfavourably of her, from seeing her in the horrid gloom of Mr. Burlew's. I assure you, her temper is very amiable. Adieu.

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER CIX.

LADY HELEN STORFORD TO LADY LUCY
BRANLYFFE.

Ashholm-park.

NEWSS! my Lucia—how is it possible I can send you news from this place? It is but two degrees better than my old uncle's pigeon-house, where I mortified in the beginning of the summer. All the news I can tell you is, that, if I were Belvedera, I would as soon be buried under ground with my grand-father, as above ground with my father; and that,

If Belvedera

Were to live here-a,

All the year-a,

I would never come near her;

but she, and her house, and carriage, and large acquaintance, will be very convenient to me in the winter; so I bear the present evil patiently, and humor her in every thing.

As to Melros, the first tidings I heard of him were, that he had left the place, and was gone, post-haste, to see his dear mama laid at her ease in Hampstead church-yard. I wonder whether

he

he knew I was coming. Bel. is so very frank about him, she commends him so highly, and professes so great a regard for him, that I am sure she does not care about him. But you mistake me if you suppose I would accept him as my *distinguished* captive; he may, (and he shall, if I have any power,) sigh for me; but the heralds have not done enough for him to make him mine. I should like very well to retain him, as the folks say, till I could *better* myself. Like a hand at commerce, I shall try to *mend* what I hold. *Aces*, or *kings*, I strive for; but *knaves* would secure me from *going up*.—*M^e entendez-vous ?*

Bel. is a sweet girl, and would be still more agreeable, if she had more vivacity; but I am every minute provoked at her frigidity. Her stiff governess, Mrs. Thirpley, ruined her natural disposition by restraint. I did hate that woman most righteously when I was a little girl, and was heartily glad, at my return from France, to hear she had packed off.

We do not want for company here; but they are only dinner visitors, and when night comes it is dismal gloomy. It would be quite another place if Melros was here, provided he was in his usual spirits; but Bel. says, he is extremely melancholy still, and indeed, if I may

judge from the effect the good lady's death has produced on those who need not have been sorry if they had not chose it, he is very dumpish; for Bel. cannot name Mrs. Melros without the tears starting in her eyes.

Though I have in my opinion scribbled and scrawled a great deal for you, you will not be content, unless I talk about coming home. Be patient, and bear your tyrant's whims, like a good girl, till Monday evening, and then you shall be blest with a sight of your

HELEN STORFORD,

LETTER CX.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

Gervaise-priory.

WERE things to be named from their appearances, I should date my letter from *Fairy-land*; for I cannot forbear thinking myself under the influence of enchantment; but as I am not certain that you would chuse to continue a friendship with one who was admitted into the recesses of the pigmy-tribe, I will still suppose I am in 'this dim spot which
'men

‘ men call earth,’ and endeavour to convince you, by a little description of this retreat, that geographers err when they place the garden of Eden in Mesopotamia.

In the morning after lady Helen forsook Ash-holm, I bid it adieu ; and I know not why, but I felt particular reluctance in doing so. I thought the place never looked so lovely as when I was quitting it. Such is the perverseness of my nature ! I surveyed it from the top of Fern-hill, as we turned from the great road, and my eyes became rivetted to the house and plantations. Strange, that I should never have felt this when I have left it for the winter to go to town !—perhaps the season of the year gave it peculiar charms.

You know my father’s intention was to leave me here as he went to London—I cannot say *in his way* to London ; because I am forty miles out of the track ;—but this, with his usual goodness, he thought no inconvenience, and we accordingly travelled together in a most agreeable manner. We set out in the phaëton, and thus enjoyed all the beauty of a glorious morning. The post-chaise followed us empty, and to it we retreated when we entered on the inhospitable downs, and the sun grew too powerful. We dined at an inn situated in the centre of

this burning marle, and, while dinner was preparing, were in some measure amused by observing on the total absence of every thing that makes the country pleasant. Want of rain, in this part of the kingdom, is soon severely felt, and it had now stripped the spot I am describing, of the only recommendation it ever can boast—its verdure. The short grass, which here uniformly serves for pasture for sheep, was turned into hay, and scarcely a blade of it retained its colour. Where horses had crossed it, their feet had torn it up in clods, and this had contributed to render the appearance that of a barren heath. These circumstances were matter of speculation to us for a short time; but as the *defects*, not the *sports* of nature, they wearied us, and we hastened our departure.

After crawling about six miles through a sand so deep that a large dog would have been buried in it, and so hot that it might have hatched chickens, we were rendered almost desperate by seeing a very steep hill before us, against which the fervor of the western sun seemed now wholly directed. It was, by our watches, nearly five o'clock; but, as if we had changed our longitude, the country bore every appearance of its being high noon, and, I really believe,

lieve, had there been another inn in view, we should have halted till midnight.

But just as we had declared the heat insupportable, with so discouraging a prospect before us, the postillions changed their course, and turned from the sandy desert, into a road so different from that we had crept along, so shaded with trees, so carefully made, and in every respect so inviting, that, even if it had not been our way, I think we could hardly have passed it. Instead of the ascent we feared to climb, our prospect was a beautiful lawn sloping from us, and refreshed by a canal, so artificially prolonged as to have the appearance of a river. This we crossed, by means of a Gothic bridge of stone, and here a new *coup d'œil* presented itself. The hill, again rising gradually, and, about the middle of the ascent, 'embosomed high in tufted trees,' the venerable Priory, whose situation, aspect, and age, conveyed to my imagination all the charms of such a life of seclusion as is above the unsatisfactory and transient enjoyments of the world, and equally removed from its cares and troubles.

We approached the fabric by a winding avenue of trees, peopled abundantly with rooks, and now and then we heard, amidst their solemn

lemn cawing, the more shrill and lively notes of smaller birds. At the end of this access, was a building of two Gothic towers, partially covered with ivy, with an arched gate between them. The extreme stillness, and sombrous gloom of this spot, seems calculated to have reminded the ancient possessors of the monastery, that it was the boundary of all sub-lunary remembrance. I was sorry when it was disturbed by the rattling of the carriage on a paved court-yard. It recalled ideas which, at that moment, I could for ever have renounced. It carried me, in thought, back to London, a place just then not at all congruous to my feelings.

We were now arrived at the house. Three sides of the quadrangle are built with offices, and the fourth is decorated with the principal front of the Priory itself;—a building so venerable, so sacred in its appearance, that even this recommendation ought to have saved it from the rage of reformation. We were led through a vestibule to an anti-room, where sir Tancred and lady Wilnor met us, with that promptitude of hospitality that bespeaks a heart-felt welcome. They conducted us to a larger parlor, which opened to a fine view of a very fine country. Refreshments of fruit, ices and cooling
ing

ing liquors, were on a side-board, and we soon felt how judicious the provision was, for in a few minutes we had forgotten our former fatigues, and seemed renovated for this new world.

I had heard that sir Tancred had a large family; but none of them had yet appeared. We were invited to a walk about the grounds, which are laid out in the bold and magnificent style of horticulture. Every thing here was cool and fragrant. The aromatic shrubs blended their salutary odors with the more exquisite scents of the flowers; a soft breeze had succeeded to the setting sun, and all was peace and complacent tranquility. In sir Tancred and lady Wilnor, though I saw their manners differed from those of the *London world*, I could discover nothing terrifying or repelling. He was grave, but not dull; she majestic, but not haughty. They seemed to enjoy my quick sense of the beauties around me; and, while they forbore encomiums on that which was their own, I could plainly perceive they were, as much as myself, alive to all its charms.

We had walked till it was more than dusk, and the moon was risen, when the wind brought on its wings the dying sound of voices singing. The notes became more and more distinct, and at last the harmony approached near enough
for

for me to distinguish, that it was occasioned by several females. I asked lady Wilnor, if her's was an enchanted wood, or whether the air in this part of the world, was loaded with Ariels? She smiled, and said, No; they were terrestrial beings that haunted the grounds,—the hama-dryads of the place. You shall see them, said she. She then called aloud—Mary.—The song stopped :—she called again; and now, from all sides, came in the songstresses. These are my girls, said lady Wilnor. They presented themselves before us with very proper civilities, when the eldest coming up to her mother, and, very respectfully and affectionately, taking her hand, said, in a low modest voice—We did not know, madam, you were so near: I am sorry we were so noisy. Never did I more ardently wish for day-light. I could only discern, that this addition to our company consisted of a group of females, twelve in number, all in white, and only differing from each other in size.

We returned together to the house. The young ladies left us while they took off their walking apparatus, and then returning, were each introduced to me by their respective christian names. I wish I could give you an idea of the sight. The eldest, I learn, is in her
 twentieth

twentieth year; the youngest in her fifth, and they have all a family likeness, though their complexions are various. To describe their persons, is impossible; but, I can truly say, that there is not a plain face, or an ordinary person among them. Miss Wilnor is the handsomest; but it is only because she is the eldest. Her beauty is in its perfection; that of her sisters seems not to have reached it.

Besides these offsets, sir Tancred and lady Wilnor have a son, the eldest of the family, who is now absent on a visit, but expected home shortly. The girls appear extremely fond of him, and delighted with the idea of seeing him: his name is by turns, a terror and a bribe; the fear of incurring Bertram's displeasure, or the hope of gaining Bertram's favour, is a sufficient dissuasive or stimulative.

You know I have often said, I thought there could be no finer sight than that of a very numerous family: here I enjoy it in its greatest excellence; for I can conceive nothing wanting to the respectability and loveliness I meet with in every one of them. To their parents they are taught to behave with great deference, though I have never yet seen any thing like severity: to each other they are all gentle and endearing, studiously polite, as far as politeness consists

consists in helping one another, and in a sedulous attention to avoid giving uneasiness.

This is an unsufferable long letter;—my paper tells me so, and yet I must leave a deep arrear of intelligence. I have not said half I designed. At my next leisure you shall have a continuation from

Your very affectionate

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE,

LETTER CXI.

MR. BELVEDERE TO LORD PORTHURST.

15th September.

MY DEAR LORD,

DEPENDING on your intention of remaining at Brussels, and calculating that you will be there to receive this, I avail myself of a leisure hour to give vent to the fullness of my heart, and to tell you, there never was a time when the support of your friendship was more necessary to prop my tottering mind and sinking spirits, than since you have been gone. The sorrows, the anxieties, the fears I have endured, are not surpassed by any in the earlier part of

my

my life, and the absolute command to silence, which prudence laid on my afflictions, rendered them insupportable. Thank God, they are so far over.

In my journey to Ashholm I was met by a letter from my daughter, in which, poor girl, ignorant of my concern in the information, she called on me to deplore a severe loss she had just sustained ;—a loss which deeply as she feels it, is of trivial importance to her, in comparison of my interest in it. This loss was no other than the death of Mrs. Melros, whom Gertrude had returned home to nurse and comfort in a severe illness that had again attacked her. O my friend ! you, and you only, can suppose the agony that seized me, on reading this sad catastrophe of a life I must ever accuse myself of having embittered and shortened.

Judge what was my distress when I reached home, and was forced to meet, to console, and caress my daughter, while my heart was riving with its own sorrow, and yet to conceal that I suffered, but from seeing her suffer. She, in all simplicity, detailed to me the circumstances of her friend's illness, and in the most plaintive accents, mourned her own misfortune, in becoming acquainted with Mrs. Melros only just
time

time enough to know her value, before she was forced to resign her.

Cruelty itself would surely have owned this a bitter punishment for my errors ; but here was only unmixed grief. The fates, or the furies, I should rather say, did not think the cup potent enough, unless it stirred up conflicting emotions in my vitals.—I did not leave Mrs. Melros night or day, said my sweet girl, when I saw her death so certain. The captain was as assiduous about her, as I could be—we could hardly prevail upon him to leave her bed-side ; but I was vain enough to hope friendship could do more than even his piety.

Here, my friend, was a dagger to my heart. A few questions informed me, that Melros and my daughter had gone through this scene of woe together. At first I blamed her for her excessive zeal ; but she soon convinced me she had done only what was incumbent on her, and had conducted herself with all possible propriety. I then had only to lament that I, by my follies and sins, had rendered even the path of virtue dangerous to her.

My fears, on this head, abated by cool consideration ; and finding it necessary to ask Philip to dine with me before he set off to attend his mother's

mother's funeral, I did not hesitate to discharge this duty of hospitality, still, however, keeping a watchful eye on both the young people. In her, I could remark nothing, but a solicitude to conduct herself handsomely, and with particular attention to her guest's ease; and in him, sorrow was so predominant, that, I dare say, if I had been in a situation to have offered him an alliance with me, he would, at that time, have rejected the proposal.

When he was about to take his leave, I was called out of the room. He soon followed me, told me he had paid his farewell compliments to miss Belvedere, declined seeing her again, and went away. I immediately returned to the room she was in, and there, to my great consternation, and my full conviction that he had made an impression on her heart, I found her crying. I was terrified and angry: I could not suppress my suspicions, and I warned her, that she must never think of him. This produced a disavowal of what I feared, and an assurance from her, that not even her affections should be disposed of, but under my sanction. You cannot picture to yourself the pain it gave me, to brandish the odious symbol of authority before her eyes. A gentle spirit like her's, neither needs, nor could endure severity.

To

To my most salutary comfort, your lovely daughter came to her to help sooth her grief. As soon as she was forced to quit us, I carried Gertrude to lady Wilnor, with whom she is, and will remain for the present. I shall, you may suppose, prolong her stay there as much as I decently can.

From something sir Tancred let fall in the evening of my leaving my daughter there, I am inclined to believe a connexion between our families, would not be unacceptable to him. His son is now absent from home, but will return shortly. The account he gives me of him, even allowing for a father's exaggeration, is such as makes me think Gertrude would not only be advantageously, but happily disposed of to him; but desirable as such an event must be to me, as it would at once relieve me from the fears that have harassed me, I thought it prudent not to understand sir Tancred. When I have heard my girl's sentiments about the family, and her opinion of the young man, it will be time enough for me to listen: till then, I should fear any thing that I hinted, by way of recommendation, might have too much influence over her; and you may believe me when I say, that not even to extricate myself from my difficulties, would I be necessary to my child's giving

giving her hand, where her heart had made no previous election.

I hope, let these affairs turn out as they may, she will be happy at the Priory. Lady Wilnor and her daughters are a fit and agreeable society for her. Or should her situation be but tolerable, it is preferable to my having her at home, while my spirits are in their present dejection.

All, or great part of my fears, you will say, might have been prevented by the confession you have so often advised. I grant it, and can add to it, that great part of my present uneasiness of mind would have been spared me, had I, ten or a dozen years ago, married Mrs. Melros; but, as against the latter, worldly prudence militated, so did conscientious shame against the former. I was averse to let Philip, when a boy, into the secret, and now I could not do it if my life depended on it; for such is the timidity of vice, though he is my son, I feel awed by his moral virtues.

Adieu, my dear lord. You have your pecuniary distresses, which are the effects of thoughtlessness—I my mental torment, the effect of inconsiderate vice. May you never know, otherwise than by my information, that your
grievances

grievances are not to be compared with those of

Your very humble servant,

FRANCIS BELVEDERE.

LETTER CXII.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

Gerwaise-priory, 18th September.

DEAR MADAM,

THIS letter is to be an appendix to my last, and to contain its overflowings; so without introduction, I shall, as somebody says, dash at once into the middle of my subject, and give you a notion of the life I lead here.

My father set off for London on the morning after our arrival, so early, that I could only bid him adieu from a window of my room. Soon after six o'clock, I heard the family stirring, and saw ten of the white-clad lasses running towards a shrubbery. Miss Wilnor cast a look up at my window, as if to judge whether I was risen. I opened the casement, and begged I might be a companion of her travels,

vels, on which she instantly returned, and came to conduct me; and this moment was the beginning of our acquaintance.

An hour and half we spent in enjoying the morning fragrance. The damsels shewed me whatever they thought could delight me, and seemed almost as much pleased as I was. Towards the end of our ramble, and when we were returned within sight of the house, I saw miss Wilnor's eyes frequently directed to her watch. I asked her, if she was straitened for time. She said, No—she was only fearful of being betrayed into staying too long; for, added she, we must be within hearing of the chapel bell, and that rings at eight. I asked if it would summon us to prayers. It obliges *us*, replied the sweet girl; but strangers are always left at their liberty. I declare, my dear madam, I felt hurt at hearing myself styled a *stranger*. To be a stranger here, I thought, was to be excluded from happiness. I therefore begged that I might be admitted to their devotions, and, in every point that did not interfere with their domestic regulations, that they would consider me as a member of their family. Miss Wilnor said, she was sure this would give her father and mother great pleasure, and that she would inform lady Wilnor of my wish. For

this purpose she left us, after having charged her next sister to take care the little ones were not troublesome to me in her absence. She was scarcely out of hearing, when Margaret, the youngest, began questioning me. And pray, miss Beldedee, will you always go with us in a morning? and will you let us young things walk with you? I was afraid you would like nobody but my mama and sister Mary; but I do believe now you will love me; and indeed you may—sister will tell you so;—for I have got all my lessons very perfect, and wrote my copies, and not blotted my book, ever since I was four years old—and now I am sure I may be loved. The fond little creature was not to be stopped, so vehement was she in urging her pretensions.—Sister Mary joined us, and poor Margaret was mute.

The bell I had heard of, now rang, and we entered the house. I found lady Wilnor had seen her sweet family before they went out. I only, therefore, had to pay my morning devoirs. We staid a few minutes in the room we had entered: the servants joined us, and we went through a long gallery in as regular a procession as ever graced a coronation.

To describe what I felt, during the performance of this truly divine service, is impossible.

I can

I can only tell you what excited my sensations, and leave you to collect, from your knowledge of me, how it operated on my mind. The chapel forms a wing to the back-front of the house, which is made uniform by the library. Its decorations are correspondent to the stile of the Priory: it is wainscoted, if I may so say, with cedar, and very much ornamented with carving: at the east end is the altar, with the decalogue, and, at the west, a gallery for the family. The body of the chapel is disposed into the form of a choir, and is filled by the servants, and such persons of the neighbourhood as chuse to attend service here, for which a permission is granted on request. There is an organ on the north side: the windows are all of painted glass, and diffuse that calm devotion-inspiring light, of all others the most proper and pleasing.

In the desk was the venerable curate of the living annexed to the estate. The service was not that of the church, but a form more particularly adapted to the circumstances of the congregation: it consisted of a very pious exhortation, prayers, and thanksgivings, that made my heart glow with gratitude to him who was the object of them. The psalms and lessons, appointed by the church, were read; at the end

of which the second daughter left us. I found she was organist for the day, and the rest were to accompany her with their voices. The anthem was a short passage from one of the psalms. Miss Wilnor sung the solo part, and it ended with a *gloria patri*, in which even little Margaret could join.

I have failed in my intention, if I have not conveyed to you the idea of a place of domestic worship, in which the Deity is adored and supplicated 'in the beauty of holiness,' where the admonition to 'do all things in decency and 'order' has been attended to; yet under the conviction, that 'the Almighty dwelleth not in 'temples made with hands.'

Forgive me if I here quit you abruptly. My leisure is expired, and I can only say, I am, dear madam,

Your very happy,

and very affectionate

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER CXIII.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

23d September, 1737.

I AM so engrossed by the present objects, that the Priory will furnish all the scenes, and the folks of the Priory all the personages of my letters for some time to come.

The family-œconomy is admirable. The four eldest young ladies take the care of the household affairs, each a week at a time. Next year, their number will be five, and thus continue encreasing as they become capable. To these four housekeepers, while in office, the four next are assistants, by which means they are initiated into the duties they will have to discharge. It is the business of the housekeeper, for the time being, to rise first in the morning and wake the others, to do the honours of the table, to inspect the laundry, dairy, poultry-yard, &c. and to distribute, with her own hands, to a limited number of poor, portions of work and food, or what else their distresses require. She and her servant-sister are therefore absent from the morning walk; but they are allowed other privileges that compensate for it. Lady Wil-

nor, with that sagacious judgment which is evident in her government, takes her turn regularly in this business, and thus at once inspects what has been done, becomes, by her example, a precept to her daughters, and shews them that these offices are no degradation.

The rest of the morning is appropriated to elegant and instructive pursuits, and is generally spent at home; the afternoon is diversified with amusements, and occasionally enlivened by visits or visitors. The day concludes as it began; and I think these good people may retire to their rest in the fullest enjoyment of a retrospect that their consciences must approve; for, if piety, charity, industry, benevolence, and gratitude to Heaven, are virtues, the Priory family are virtuous.

I hear myself called—at my next leisure I will continue.

26th September.

The large society here would always prevent my having leisure to write, if I followed my inclination to be with them; but delighted as I am in their company, I feel some counterpoise in my wish to give you a little insight into my felicities.

It

It will, I am certain, please you, to be told that the Priory has wrought a very advantageous change in my spirits. I have regained my wonted chearfulness, and sir Tancred and lady Wilnor say my looks credit them. Indeed I must be constitutionally untoward, if I did not, in every possible way, manifest their kindness; for they seem to consider me as one of their children, and, to do my young friends justice, they receive me most willingly into their sisterhood.

Mr. Wilnor is come home, and, to my no small surprise, has brought captain Melros with him. I had no idea of their being intimate; nor, till he became their guest, was he personally known to any others of the family. Mr. Wilnor has been for some time acquainted with him; he met him in the neighbourhood of London, where he has been visiting, and, perceiving the dejection he laboured under, prevailed on him to accompany him hither. The captain's being acquainted with my father and me, is another link of connection, and he is as heartily welcomed as myself. A more cordial reception, or more friendly treatment, he cannot wish for.

But, after all, I could very well have dispensed with this addition to our society; for

though I have the highest esteem for captain Melros, the meeting at present revives a remembrance of circumstances painful to both. A heavy gloom comes over him now and then; but I think he is growing more lively than when he came.

Mr. Wilnor suffers by a comparison with his friend, who, in his person and manners, has much more the air of the world. I do not, however, mean, that the former is at all disagreeable: he is far from it; and there is a degree of good nature and frankness about him, that has already made me forget how lately we were strangers. He is extremely attentive to us, joins in all our little schemes of pleasure, and really contributes very much to our amusements. Under his protection we can do many things that 'a bevy of damsels' could not undertake; and he and his friend are always ready to escort us through any adventurous paths.

I do not think a situation could have been devised for me, which would have proved so salutary to my bruised mind, as this. The objects are so new to me, and I live in a society so different from any thing I have been used to, that I remember little of my former state of being, and am apt to look on Gertrude Belvedere and myself, as distinct personages. This pretty delirium

lirium has been once most agreeably disturbed by a long letter from my dear father, and sometimes not so pleasantly by the entrance of captain Melros with his woe-begone countenance ; but I soon again catch the pleasing delusion.

I hope lady Helen is as happy as myself—happier I cannot wish her. She is with her favourite friend, lady Lucy Branlyffe : I have not heard from her since we parted, nor shall I, probably, till we talk of shifting quarters, in which my father is to make the first motion. I have written to him an account of my pleasures, from whence he will infer, that he needs not recall me soon to fix me more agreeably. London would be solitary, compared to the Priory : one's life there is a contrast of fatiguing diversion and consequent languor—three hours' amusement, and six hours' weariness ; but here, the fates having nothing to disturb them, our thread of existence is more regularly spun, neither so coarse as to be harsh, nor so fine as to be dangerously attenuated.

You will say, when you read this, that I was in high spirits when I wrote it :—it is very true ; but all the happiness in the world shall never make me forget how much I am

Your obliged

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER CXIV.

LADY HELEN STORFORD TO MISS
BELVEDERE.

Vale Ofier, 2d October.

DEAREST BELLA,

LUCY is ill, and I have the comfort of nursing her; that is to say, I am forced to sit by her bed-side, and read or talk to her. Pray Heaven, this illness may not last long; I am quite weary of it. It is three days old now, and that is a monstrous time to be sick—longer by two days, twenty-three hours, and three quarters, than I ever was sick or sorry in my life. I do believe she would be very well if she would but try:—if one determines not to mind illness, there is nothing in it. You know how I danced, some time ago, with such a pain in my side that I could not breathe; but I battled it, and was very well next day.

Only think what a dreadful situation mine is now!—to be cooped up in the house, and in a sick room, and she is so peevish and fretful, that she could quarrel with her fingers' ends. Branlyffe concerns himself very little about her. By the way, there is not the harmony between
them

them that there was. Lucy was saying the other day, what a comfortable thing it would be : if marriages were temporary ;—so you may guess how she stands affected, and I dare say if her colonel had heard her, he would have joined in her opinion. If I have any skill in physiognomy, they are tired of one another.

I hear you have got Melros among you.— You good-for-nothing thing, you engross all the pleasures of the world, and care not how bare you leave your poor friends ; but I am a fool to envy you this sweetner to your bitter beverage, for I have a notion that, without Melros, your present paradise would resemble my old uncle Burlew's elysium.

I have drest up, in my own mind, a most captivating idea of your host of hosts and hostesses. Much about as pleasant as being at school, I suppose.—Regular as the clock, stiff as quakers are your actions, and their movers. I shall perhaps have a peep at the outside of your nunnery when I come to release you. No more than that short visit will shew her, is desired by.

Your,

HELEN STORFORD.

P. S. Tell Melros I am going to be married, and then tell me how he looks on it.

LETTER CXV.

MISS BELVEDERE TO LADY HELEN
STORFORD.

Gervaise-priory, 5th October.

MY DEAR LADY HELEN,

IN your present disconsolate situation, it is incumbent on me to do what little is in my power to cheer you. This scanty ability extends no farther than to an early notice of your last letter, which, believe me, would have been infinitely more welcome to me, if I had learnt from it that you were as happy as I was, before I opened it.

If I endeavour to rectify your opinion of my enjoyments here, it will have the appearance of exulting in mine, while your's are at ebb; but yet I must not suffer you to think unjustly of my worthy and hospitable friends, nor to form an erroneous idea of *Priory pleasures*. We live, it is true, much by rule; but as it is the rule

rule of rectitude, we live satisfactorily; and though we cannot boast that which some people deem the summit of felicity, the unheeded passage of the hours, we have the supreme compensation of knowing that they do not pass unprofitably. Time is here used, enjoyed, but not wasted; and such is the effect our mode of life has had on my mind, that it will require the efforts of practice and custom to reconcile me to any other.

I am sorry to hear of lady Lucy's indisposition, both on her account and your's; but as to your comical notion, that sickness may, by the help of good spirits, be dismissed at pleasure, I cannot quite agree with you. May you, nevertheless, always continue of this opinion, or learn that you are wrong, only by the report of some one you must credit, but cannot love.

Your sagacity, I would persuade myself, has misled you into a supposition that your friends, the colonel and lady Lucy, are less attached than formerly, to each other. Do not believe this;—for your own sake, shut your eyes against it, while you are with them. If, however, the matter be indubitable, and your stay at the Vale threatens the annoyance of your peace, I am not so ungrateful as to hesitate whether I
shall

shall please myself with my new friends, or relieve you; but will immediately attend you to London, or, with my father's permission, to Athholm.

How can you be so cruel as to grudge us captain Melros's company for a little while? His stay here will not be long; and if he can resist such fascinations as thirteen damsels, and a mother as lovely as any of them, not to say a word of sir Tancred and Mr. Wilnor, how much will your triumph be increased when we restore him to you! He will spend great part of the winter in town, so that you will have opportunities of playing your artillery. To spirit you to exertion, I will give you my opinion, which is, that he is wholly invulnerable; for instead of manifesting, as he certainly ought to do, his perplexity in chusing amongst us, he joins us with good humour, leaves us without regret, and appears as much his own master as if we were pictures or statues. If he is to be enchained, it must be by lady Helen Storford; but when you next have a *tete-à-tete* with that lady, advise her to be careful, lest she inclose herself in the fetters she is forging for him. So counsels your ladyship's sapient friend, and most respectful humble servant,

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

P. S. I

P. S. I have hitherto postponed executing the commission you charged me with, and shall do so till I have *your* authority for the intelligence.

LETTER CXVI.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

10th October.

DEAREST MADAM,

I COME to try if there is indeed that relief in discharging a perturbed mind of its load, that I have heard of. The day has been a day of distress to me, and the solemn hour of midnight is arrived, before my eyes are prepared to slumber; and yet my troubles may be called ideal. I have no one but myself to accuse, and nothing but my own folly to condemn;—but self-condemnation is, I believe, the most pungent of all suffering. We have something internal to bear us up under foreign injury; that which is of our own infliction, it is as difficult to endure, as it is impossible to revenge.

Let me try if I can tell my story coherently, or you will never understand it;—candidly, I am persuaded,

persuaded, I can relate it; for you shall know my faults and my follies. Eleven o'clock, this morning, was the time captain Melros had named for leaving us. A chaise was ordered, and he had made the necessary dispositions, and bid us farewell last night. As you well know how severely I feel the parting with those I have any regard for, you will believe I wished to avoid seeing him on his setting out. I thought the ladies and myself would have been engaged in our walk, which the season obliges us to take after breakfast; but lady Wilnor objected that the weather was not fine enough, and we staid at home. At ten o'clock, little Margaret came to me, in my room, with captain Melros's compliments, and a request, that he might speak a few words to me in the breakfast parlor. I could not refuse; yet I did not like to go alone: the family might consider it as an indecorum, and be offended at it. I therefore went to miss Wilnor, told her the message, and asked her to accompany me, which, with a smile that indicated her knowing why I was sent for, she declined, *as it might distress captain Melros.*

Down stairs I went, with trembling steps, and a confused head; doubtful, I will confess to you, what I wished, or what I feared. I called

called to mind my father's emphatical words, *be is the last man in the world you ought to think on*; and, I believe I entered the room steadily. The captain was waiting for me. I could make nothing of his countenance. He apologised for *the rude summons* he had sent me—excused it by having no prospect of another opportunity of seeing me, and begged my patient hearing. I was all attention. He hesitated for a few seconds, and then said, he feared he should mar the cause he wished to promote;—that unless he could persuade me to believe the antiquated doctrine, which asserts that love to be most sincere which is least eloquent, and enjoins the acceptance of silence rather than profession, he could have no hope of making any impression on my mind;—that I should perhaps doubt the warmth of an attachment, with an appearance so frigid; but that when the difficulty of a first discovery was overcome, then was the time for it to appear with its proper glow, either in gratitude for acceptance, or opposition to rejection.

In these vague terms did he express himself. I was on the rack while he spoke; but I never questioned their meaning. Already prepossessed in his favour, I listened to him in full credulity. I felt gratified by his sentiments,
till

till I was stung by the remembrance of my father's prohibition. To refuse him my love, who already had my esteem, I was compelled to resolve—to do it, was the hardest task ever before me.

He soon released me from my distress;—and how did he release me?—by plunging me into still deeper. After haranguing me, for some minutes, in general language, he astonished me, by saying, it was for his friend, Mr. Wilnor, that he pleaded!

My features, I trust, had not yet betrayed me. I was confounded with surprise; but, in my heart, most religiously thankful, that I had not manifested the error I had adopted. Captain Melros, in whose countenance I now saw evident marks of anxiety for his friend's success, pressed me for some expression of encouragement to carry to Mr. Wilnor. My recollection had nearly forsaken me: a negative, I feared, would betray me; an affirmative I could not utter; and not at all considering the import my words bore, and glad, at any rate, to get rid of the subject, I said, the application should have been made to my father.

A sense of my folly instantly struck me. I raised my eyes, and saw a forced smile on the captain's features. I begged him not to misunderstand.

understand me. I would have explained away the encouraging reference :—he rose suddenly ; drew out his handkerchief, I do believe to hide his laugh at my folly ; said he perfectly understood me, and hastily left me.

I had remained alone, musing on the silly part I had acted, but a few minutes, when Mr. Wilnor himself, as if to complete my distress, came to me. He had heard, from captain Melros, my reply, and had taken it in the sense I did not mean it should bear ; and in this mistake I was forced to suffer him to remain ; for I had scarcely ability to utter a word, much less to support argument, or defend my meaning. He was most passionately grateful for that I had given him without design : he acknowledged an obligation which I never intended to confer, and construing my silence into acquiescence, and my agitation in his favour, his vehemence made it impossible for me to undeceive him. At last gaining courage, from the pressing danger I was in of being entrapped by my own words, I desired time to consider, before I gave him a final answer. He told me, with a degree of generosity that, I own, spoke for him, that he scorned to betray me into a precipitate resolution. He did not, he added, wish to deafen my reason by the voice of passion ;

sion; on the contrary, that I might have the ablest counsel to abide by, he had, on hearing my reply to captain Melros, engaged him to see my father as soon as he got to London, and to acquaint him with the reference I had made to him.

Here was now the consummation of my indiscretion. By a few words uttered, when I scarce knew what I said, I have given away the right of decision;—but yet, ought I not to be contented? I am satisfied my father will prefer my inclination to my interest, in such a case. I am sure he will decide ably for me. I shall discover what will make him happy, and as he directs, I will act.

As soon as I could, I got away from Mr. Wilnor, and was crossing the hall to go up the stairs, when I met sir Tancred, who was returning from seeing captain Melros set off. He accosted me, with his usual good natured looks, and, taking my hand, led me into the library. Here I learnt that his son's application had his sanction. He had heard my wife answer, and had, equally with the rest, misunderstood it; but he talked to me, for half an hour, in such a manner; he seemed so delighted with the hopes I had undesignedly raised, that I dared not say a syllable of explanation, and I began

began to be reconciled to a necessity which I saw would please him.

The knowledge of this business is at present confided to no more of the females than lady Wilnor and her eldest daughter. I have heard of little else, all day, than the joy I have occasioned. Lady Wilnor flatters me by saying, I am the only girl she ever wished to be her daughter-in-law; and miss Wilnor shews her pleasure equally, by her excessive anxiety lest my father should oppose their wishes.

Which way my inclination bends, I cannot exactly tell. If Mr. Wilnor is discouraged, I shall be at liberty; but to what end?—the man whom, of all others, I ought not to think of, I never can think of, for I never will offend my father; and all the rest of the world are still more indifferent to me than Mr. Wilnor, to whom I have no dislike. On my father's acquiescence, I foresee, depends my stay here. I would give up a good deal before I would be separated from such friends. I am persuaded, it is impossible I ever can be unhappy while I retain the regard of this family, and to do as they wish, as it can never be imprudent, is my best means of shewing a sense of their love. Friendship towards them must supply the place of a warmer passion where it is expected. I cannot

cannot say Bertram Wilnor is *the man* of all others I should have chosen; my heart feels little impulse towards him. I must be comforted that it has no aversion. I can resolve on nothing, but to be guided by my father.

As soon as any thing occurs, either to forward or impede this negociation, you shall hear again from

Your embarrassed

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER CXVII.

MRS. THIRPLEY TO MISS BELVEDERE.

MY DEAR LOVE,

IT is not a quarter of an hour since your letter reached me, and I think it my duty, as your friend, instantly to reply to it. Your having made a reference to your father, renders the interposition of any one else, in some measure, censurable; but this I must risque; for I cannot bear to see you consigning yourself to a situation which, at best, can be only *not miserable*, without intreating you thoroughly to weigh, and reflect on what you are doing.

I ap-

I applaud highly your resolution never to offend your father ; but I cannot commend that extreme docility, or, I may say, supineness, which leads you to sacrifice all your own feelings out of complaisance to your friends. That you have a high esteem for Mr. Wilnor's family, will not make you happy as his wife, if you are indifferent to him. You might surely preserve their regard at a less expence than this.

I would not say a word about any opinion you may entertain of captain Melros, because I have a firm hope, amounting almost to positive confidence, that you have command enough over yourself to stifle any inclination that can make the performance of your duty uneasy ; but of this I must warn you, that there is not a situation more painful, or more dangerous, than that of a woman who marries a man she is indifferent to, while she has a prepossession in favour of another. Your *peace of mind* is all it would affect ; but, in many cases, it has been productive of every imaginable consequent calamity.

If, as probably is by this time the case, your determination is fixed, you must endeavour, by every means, to cherish and increase your regard for Mr. Wilnor. You can scarcely be
certain

certain yet, what affection you feel for him: you have known him a very little while, and, during that little while, he has been accompanied by a friend, who, like Hephestion, has attracted, and perhaps made you misplace your regard.

But, if it is not too late, and what I have here urged inclines you to doubt the propriety of your remitting all to the dispensation of others, I would advise your immediately writing to Mr. Belvedere, and, without saying any thing of the error captain Melros's application led you into, I would have you fairly tell him, that your surprise and fright had led you to do what your heart cannot ratify; and, depend upon it, he will find some handsome way of breaking off the match, even if he has accepted the proposal.

Above all things act deliberately, and with proper consideration. Recollect the importance of the decision you are making, and do not suppose, that the virtues, or friendship, of the relations of the man you marry, can atone even for *ideal* defects in him. Mr. Wilnor may deserve your love, and yet it may not be in your power to direct it towards him. He may be eminently worthy, and yet you may be miserable with him.

Should

Should this advice be unseasonable, or seem impertinent, you have only to disregard it. You will, nevertheless, believe it dictated by a justifiable motive, and that I am, however injudicious,

Your very sincere friend,

ANNE THIRPLEY.

LETTER CXVIII.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

18th October.

INDEED, my dear madam, your advice is not unseasonable, nor have I disregarded it. I have read your letter often, and am happy to say, I think I can do all it enjoins, without disturbing the peace of those I revere and love. If this is not the case, I must *make* it so; for your good counsel arrived a little too late:—all was concluded on, and I was decreed to be Bertram Wilnor's wife, some hours before you bid me deliberate on it.

My father answered the application, not by writing, but by a journey hither. While he was talking with sir Tancred, (for the first

consultation was between them only,) think of the agitation I was in ! I was sent for to the library. Sir Tancred had retired, and my father, very seriously, questioned me on the important subject; telling me, he would not for the world compel me, or suffer his authority to appear in a transaction that so intimately concerned my future quiet. Impressed by his goodness, you cannot blame me for giving myself up to his guidance. I promised to do, and I begged I might do whatever he directed, and nothing that he was not perfectly satisfied with. He asked me, and I am sure that, at the time, he thought of captain Melros, whether I had ever seen any gentleman with whom I imagined I should be happier than with Mr. Wilnor. Instantly recollecting that, if the merit of all the world were concentrated in one man, yet if that man were under my father's prohibition, I could never be happy with him, I unhesitatingly said—No—and again referred myself to his choice. This, by his laughing at me, I found implied an inclination towards Mr. Wilnor. I fear it implied more than it meant. Be that as it may, my father soon settled my mind, by telling me, that the situation offered me was, of all that could be offered, that which he should most approve. He said much in favour of

of Mr. Wilnor, and represented to me the advantages, the comforts, and the pleasures I should derive from being united so closely to a family I so love and so honour. In short, I dare say that, if I do not feel all that those do who are allowed an unbiaſſed choice, I ſhall yet be ſufficiently happy, and it will be amply made up to me in the certainty, that I am purſuing the path my beſt friends have marked out for me.

By the concise method my father has taken, in negotiating perſonally, our affairs are perfectly ſettled. I am to renounce my name about Chriſtmas, and am not to depart from this place while my initials are G. B. Soon after I am G. W. we are to go to town, accompanied by miſs Wilnor. We are to remain, during the winter, at my father's, then to return hither, viſit other diſtant friends, and, in the enſuing year, become regular houſe-keepers. This is what is arranged for me; excepting in the article reſpecting miſs Wilnor, I have not interferred. I am as paſſive as a ſhip, when her owners order her to take in ſuch a freight, to ſail at ſuch a time, to touch at ſuch and ſuch ports, and return home again.

One advantage I ſhall derive from the *ſang froid* I am at preſent bleſſed with: I ſhall be-

come acquainted impartially with Mr. Wilnor's temper, before it is my duty to study it; and indeed some advantage of this sort I ought to have, for our intimacy is of far far too short a date. As I am not over solicitous to recommend myself to him, he too will have an opportunity of seeing me in my true and natural character, and will more easily discover what he ought to correct in me. On my part, it will be a very sober rational match, entered into from, I hope, the most justifiable motives; but I cannot say quite so much in commendation of Mr. Wilnor's calm rationality: — he is not my counterpart; he is my opposite. I could almost wish he had something to call him from home for a few weeks. I fear his excessive assiduity will be offended at my indifference.

My father is returned to town, and has left me a promise to be present at our marriage. I should dispute the right of any one else to dispose of me, and the having him in view, will give me a degree of cheerfulness I may perhaps need.

Lady Helen must be told how matters stand, as this unlooked-for event will prolong my stay here beyond the time we thought of. I do not much like to write the intelligence; because it will be as soon published as if it were in the newspapers.

newspapers. I believe I shall tell lady Wilnor my difficulty, and consult her on it.

You cannot think what an effect the prospect of my becoming allied to the Priory, has on the family. All the girls have been told, under a strict injunction to secrecy. They are so fond of calling me sister, so busy in inventing presents for me, and seem so delighted, that I have reason to rejoice in the situation I have been unwarily drawn into.

If I have written nonsense, blame Mr. Wilnor, who allowed me a very short time for my letter to you. He is come into the parlour, where I am sitting, and I cannot keep him silent. Now he has taken a book, and posted himself in the window opposite to me; I cannot believe he attends very closely to his author, as he keeps his watch in his hand, and is every moment reminding me how time wears. What shall I do with him and his impatience till Christmas? Adieu.

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER CXIX.

MR. BELVEDERE TO LORD PORTHURST.

October 18th, 1787.

YOU, who have so often participated my griefs, have an unquestionable claim to share all my joys, and none that I could inform you of, will you more readily rejoice in, than in the prospect I now have of casting off the painful part of all my anxiety for my girl. The visit to the Priory has, without any previous interposition of mine, succeeded to my wishes. Bertram Wilnor is passionately smitten with her, and I have been requested to assent to their nuptials. The matter was communicated to me by Philip, who, to increase my terrors, was, for some time, a fellow-guest with her at Gerlaise. Providentially they have both escaped, and he was employed by Mr. Wilnor to open his proposals.

But that no force might be put on my daughter, and that I might judge for myself of the state of her heart, I thought it prudent rather to go, than write to sir Tancred. I sounded Gertrude, in fear, I confess, that my questions would bring out what I did not wish her even

to

to imagine ; but, thank God, she seems, if she ever had any *penchant* for Melros, to have conquered it ; and, though I believe her constitution is too tepid for a violent passion, I could perceive, under her eyelids, that she had no aversion to Mr. Wilnor.

In point of pecuniary advantage, this match is as good as I would desire for her. I too well know, from sad experience, that peace and wealth are not inseparably connected ; and have learnt, in the school of repentance, how far preferable the former is to the latter. Sir Tancred has always been prudent ; and this, in spite of his numerous family, has made him rich. As it is more convenient to me, at present, to pay interest, than part with principal, I have agreed to give the young folks an annuity of 500*l*. What Tancred does for his son is rather more, so that they will live at ease, tho' not profusely. As their wants increase, so must their finances ; but the lover's father is very averse to his son's having more money than he knows what to do with.

As to Mr. Wilnor himself, he is, I think, just what people describe, by saying of a person, *he is very well*. There is nothing very striking in him ; he bears his part decently in conversation, but has no great knowledge of the

world ; for which reason, I propose they should at first reside with their friends, rather than set up for themselves. Every body who could say any thing of him, speaks well as to his moral character and his temper ; so that, as Gertrude marries him by choice, I hope she runs no hazard of being uneasy with him.

I have a foolish curiosity to know whether I was right in my suspicion about Melros ; but this I never shall know, unless I could get a sight of her letters to her friend, Mrs. Thirpley, to whom, I dare affirm, every secret of her heart is confided. Be as it will, I have abundant reason to be thankful that the danger is past, without my being forced to the racking necessity of divulging what I will carry to my grave with me. As my affairs have prospered, I do not at all repent of my obstinate silence ; for, had I been as communicative as you would have had me, poor Philip would have borne a public stigma about him, which his spirit could never have brooked, and it might have had a very mischievous, and a very desperate effect on his conduct and his mind. One concession, however, I must make to you : it is only my success that warrants my perseverance ;—it ends well, and, therefore, all is well. But, had my fears, at one time, been realised, I should have
had

had much to reproach myself with, and new cause to curse the Argus of Eadlip.

The pleasing *coup d'œil* which the Priory has opened to me, has, in some measure, obliterated the grief that dear woman's death has cost me; but still it hangs about my heart, and I question whether I shall wholly recover it. My feelings are something a-kin to those of a murderer. Indeed, I believe, I could have been fatally successful in a duel, without suffering half so much as I do from my gloomy retrospect. But on this subject I feel I must not write. Business too, I must postpone for the present; for my head is full of my girl. If you will allow the fondness of a *father*, to be as good an excuse for this sort of occupancy, as the wild passion of a *lover*, you will justify me, by adverting to some two or three and twenty years ago, when you could neither write, speak, nor think, of any thing, or any body, but your charming and tyrannical miss Burlew,—to whom, under her present designation, I beg my respectful compliments. ‘O when these two long years are out,’ and we meet so fortified in prudence, as to have no farther need of frugal trips, how delighted shall I be to shew you the happy conclusion of my parental cares!

K. 5.

Then,

Then, I would hope, I shall begin to live in peace;—but this is never to be my lot.

‘ The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices

‘ Make instruments to plague and punish us.’

I may have every comfort and blessing of this world doubled on me, and yet be a very wretch. That my sorrows may have some intermixture of joys, that temporary occurrences may brighten the gloom I have drawn round myself, is all I can ask, and I fear this is more than ought to fall to the share of

Your undeserving friend,

FRANCIS BELVEDERE.

LETTER

LETTER CXX.

MISS BELVEDERE TO LADY HELEN
STORFORD.

Gervaise, 18th October.

DEAR LADY HELEN,

IT is due to you that I should acquaint you, as soon as possible, with any accident that affects a scheme you are concerned in. My father's plan, for my stay here and return to London, is a little changed, and I cannot leave this place till about the middle of January. This would distress me, as an inconvenience to you, had not lady Wilnor proposed an accommodation, to which, I hope, you will assent. She has commissioned me to request the favour of your company here, as soon as is agreeable to you to quit the Vale, and that you will remain with us till I go to town. All the family join in the invitation, and depend on your compliance for a great pleasure. I could give you a very attractive description of our enjoyments here; but, I flatter myself, that is unnecessary, if I add, that your coming will very much oblige

Your faithful

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

K 6

P. S. Re-

P. S. Remember me respectfully to colonel and lady Lucy Branlyffe ; I hope her ladyship is, long before this, perfectly recovered. Captain Melros is gone.

LETTER CXXI.

LADY HELEN STORFORD TO MISS BELVEDERE.

Vale Ofier, 20th October.

DEAREST BEL,

PRESENT my best regards to the Priory-family, and say for me, that I shall, with great pleasure, avail myself of their obliging invitation.

You cannot imagine what a cloud fell on my spirits, when I read that paragraph of your letter, which told me your removal was postponed. This once happy valley is now an insufferable solitude. Lucy's disorder is nervous, and she will see no company, nor let any body else see any. If she is alone a quarter of an hour, she is quite peevish, and is sure to welcome whoever is so unfortunate as to come in her way, with reproaches and complaints;

complaints ; and to sit with her eternally is impossible, for any body that does not think being buried alive very agreeable. She always supposes, if her husband and I are absent at once, that we are together, and that displeases her ; but I could tell her, if I had a mind to gratify her, that I am not so fond of his company ; for he behaves very queerly of late, and, if I were to stay here much longer, I must begin to keep him at a distance.

I told lady Lucy, that lady Wilnor and you had urged me to come into Suffex ; but I concealed that it was an invitation which would not hasten my departure ; because indeed as soon as I found a hope of getting away, I longed to put it in practice. She says my friends are very cruel to take me from her, when she can bear no other company. Branlyffe swears if I go, he will set off for London instantly. That would be positively cruel, and would make Lucy downright jealous ; so I have compounded matters. The physicians advise her trying change of scene, and she thinks of following their prescription in a few days. Expect me, therefore, towards the latter end of the week, or sooner if I can.

What can it be that has altered your scheme ? If Melros is gone, what is there in the country worth

worth staying for? I shall be dying with curiosity till I know what detains you. Some beau in the neighbourhood, perhaps. I long to see what are the powers that can subdue your heart. Adieu. Believe you hold the first place in that of

Your obliged

H. STORFORD,

LETTER CXXII.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

25th October.

I HAVE no patience—the little stock I set out in the world with, is quite exhausted. Mr. Wilnor's querulous importunity is not to be borne with. What would the man have?—Is it not enough that my father has promised me to him, and that I have ratified that promise? and yet he is incessantly complaining, as if I was the most obdurate creature in the universe. He does not seem to know that my esteem waits on his actions. No; I must return his passion; I must feel for him, what he feels for me; and a heap of such puling nonsense, does he

weary

weary me with every day. I cannot charge myself with having, either intentionally, or carelessly, given him cause for uneasiness;—coquetry is a species of baseness that I scorn; but if he expects me to sing a counterpart to his dying ditty, he must, and he will, be disappointed.

This is the only circumstance in his character that I dislike. I see a thousand things in him to love; and his natural dispositions are so amiable, that I ought to forgive this weakness, for a weakness it certainly is.

1st November.

That I am no longer mistress of my actions must be my excuse, not only for my not having finished this letter, but for all other neglects. In the natural state of our society, I have two masters, and thirteen mistresses, from whom I never find it easy to detach myself; and now, the difficulty is considerably increased, by Mr. Wilnor's claim to my leisure hours, and, by what will still more surprise you, the addition of lady Helen Storford to this happy circle. I told you I was rather at a loss what to do about her. Lady Wilnor, when I consulted her, soon relieved me, by desiring me to invite my friend hither. I obeyed her. Lady Helen was
glad

glad to be released from lady Lucy, who continues ill. She is now here, and will remain so till we go to town.

Before she arrived, I prepared Mr. Wilnor, and his sisters, for her blaze of beauty; and I did prudently, for the goddess came arrayed in such studied negligence as made her lovelier than ever. She is extremely admired here; but, I am rather sorry to perceive sir Tancred and lady Wilnor are not much pleased with her levity. This I can discover in their looks, whenever she gives her vivacity the rein. Her spirits are too much for miss Wilnor, and little Margaret remains constant to me. She says, lady *Hillin* has got a sweet face; but miss *Bel-dedee* is her favourite. All the rest of the girls are charmed with lady Helen's shape, lady Helen's eyes, lady Helen's hat, or feathers, or hair, or gown, or something belonging to lady Helen. Mr. Wilnor, the thinker whose opinion is of most importance to me, says, if any body would give her to him, he would keep her in a glass, to be worshipped by all the votaries of Cytherean beauty: he allows her to be the prettiest *doll* he ever saw, but denies her any farther merit; so I am in no danger from her; and yet she catches his attention now and then, by a lively repartee, or ludicrous expression,

sion, and he begins to find out, that she has a little wit.

I must confess she adds to our entertainment. She is a comic muse, perpetually presenting or inspiring mirth. She professes herself pleased with the family, and with my prospect. She laughs at Bertram for his excessive fondness of me, and he has, I think improved by it; for he puts a little restraint on his impatience, and is a much more reasonable creature.

Of her talents, she will leave a specimen at the Priory. When Mr. Wilnor was in the height of his fears about the reception I might give his overtures, and had drawn me in his mind the very image of disdain, he anticipated his rejection, and on the wainscot of a summer house in the garden, which he had once fixed on as the place for speaking to me, he scrawled these lines:—

HERE, in this tranquil cool retreat,
With doubt and fear oppress'd,
In gentlest strains, my new-born love
For Gertrude, I confess.

'Twas here, the inexorable maid
Refus'd my pray'rs to hear,
And to the light-wing'd zephyrs gave
My vows of love sincere.

Who'd

Who'd think those eyes, that erst could weep
 At fiction's well-wrought woe,
 Could all my real grief behold,
 And no compassion shew ?

Or that a voice, whose heav'nly strains,
 Obduracy might move,
 With sharp resentment she could arm,
 To scorn my proffer'd love ?

O, that my Gertrude would relent,
 And own my love sincere ;
 Or, that these fetters I could break,
 Which hold me captive here.

But if nor pity I can gain,
 Nor my lost liberty ;
 Then, welcome death ! thy friendly hand
 Shall set the wretched free.

Of this maudlin poetical infusion, as I had not entered the building since it was inscribed there, I knew nothing, till a party of us strolled thither two mornings ago. The verses caught lady Helen's eye : she begged the use of a pencil, and, with as much ease as I now scrawl, wrote the following recitative and air in reply :—

RECLINING on the river's mossy bank,
 His head with woe-betokening cypress crown'd,
 Thus, in the days of whining past'ral love,

Mourn'd

Mourn'd silly Corydon his nymph's disdain,
 While she, obdurate still, behind the brake,
 Laugh'd at his abject grief, mock'd all his plaints,
 And taunting, to his melody replied :

Thy contemptible love each maid must deride,

O Corydon, foolish and fond ;

But she, who deserted by all men beside,

Is compelled, in old age, to despond.

Thy ditties give o'er, if the fair thou would'st gain ;

No compassion shall he ever move,

Who no merit can plead, but his skill to complain,

And resigns all his reason to love.

Go, blush for thy weakness, to cities repair ;

Learn thence, that the love-stricken youth,

Succeed not by sorrow, and tears, and despair,

But by manliness, valor, and truth:

If lady Helen had more application, she might, I am convinced, do any thing. I wish she would take a little more pains to please sir Tancred and lady Wilnor. I cannot help feeling as if I were responsible for her conduct ; and it vexes me heartily to see her, every day, as assiduous in the decoration of her person as if she were going into public to be gazed at ; to find her in bed when the chapel-bell rings in the morning, in the middle of dress when dinner is on the table, and, in the height
 of

of her volubility, when the family are gravely retiring to their rest—

These, and a thousand trifles such as these,
Corrode our comfort, and destroy our ease:

Surely it is the duty of every one, by a little compliance, to avoid these petty faults, which, I am firmly persuaded, create more disgust in the minds of our friends, than errors more glaring, but not so frequently recurring.—Sweet Helen, is thoughtless Helen. I would give something I could prevail on her to lay by her complexion while she is here: lady Wilnor sees through it, and, I know, is uneasy about her daughters. This is seriously wrong; but she laughs and sings me out of all my firmness when I hint at it.

For the present, adieu. A few weeks more—O how the time flies!—a few weeks more, will deprive me of the right of styling myself wholly

Your

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER

LETTER CXXIII.

LADY HELEN STORFORD TO LADY LUCY
BRANLYFFE.

Gervaise-priory, Suffex.

HERE am I, surrounded by great girls and little girls, amused with their various accomplishments, charmed with the old house and picturesque grounds, awed by sir Tancred and lady Wilnor's gravity, and, to the last degree, diverted with a pair of pastoral lovers. Without this latter episode, I should perhaps think myself a nun of the Priory; but these dear creatures are so good as to set me right. The pair I mean, are persons no less illustrious than Bertram Wilnor, Esq. only son of sir Tancred Wilnor of Gervaise-priory, Suffex, baronet, and miss Belvedere, whose expected wealth must supply an addition to her name. Miss did not chuse to let me into her confidence, till I came hither. She says, all the county of Kent would have known it from me. And what then? By all my hopes of a coronet, whenever I am married, half a dozen counties shall ring of it. I have no notion of obscurity.

The

The lover himself is so wrapped up in his fair one, that he lives but in her sight. In vain have I assailed him; he sees no beauty but in Gertrude. I shall not leave him so: her keeping a secret from me, is a sufficient motive to revenge, and I am determined to try a little of my power on him. But, alas! to what purpose?—the match is finally resolved on, and agreed to by all parties, and I am to enjoy the mortifying honor of seeing a girl, younger than myself, with not half my pretensions, if we except a load of guineas, scraped together in a dirty banking-house, a wife before me. O Helen, Helen! this will not suit thy pride—thou must whet thy arrows more keenly.

Dame Wilnor's family-brood consists of this bridegroom elect, and twelve misses, all fine girls, but deadly uncouth. They are so in earnest about every thing, that I think their application must shortly turn their brains. All morning they are as busy as so many charity-children at school. I could not endure to sit hour after hour, as they do. I make Gertrude almost as idle as myself, and if I can detach her from the laborious party, we are sure to have Bertram of our's.

Bella is as thoughtful as if she were *not* going to be married. Instead of being all life, and
soul,

soul, and gaiety, in contemplating her situation, and the charming *eclat* of being a bride, she seems to wish not to think of it. While Bertram is whipping the hours forward with all his might, she is beseeching them to stay. She says, (only think what a simpleton the dear girl is!) her acquaintance with Mr. Wilnor is too short. I suppose nothing less than an antediluvian courtship would please her. But I must not laugh at her. Bel is a most amiable creature, and all the family here are delighted with her. I love her as well as any of them; and, if she shines a little more after she is married, I dare say she will be very much the fashion, and then I shall love her dearly. But yet this same being a wife before me, sticks monstrously in my pride's stomach.

The wedding is to be solemnized here, in a few weeks, and then the married folks, Bertram's eldest sister, and myself, all hie back to dear London with Mr. Belvedere, who comes down to give up his right to his darling. With him we are all to abide for some months. It will be a scene of delightful gaiety. O if it were not for this abominable wedding!—or rather, O for a stroke that should make the hero of it mine! What would I not give for the power?

None

None of the young ladies here know any thing, or have any idea of life; and it is my joy to make them long for town-amusements, by describing operas, balls, masquerades, &c. I am their oracle, for Bel chuses to keep them in ignorance; but the poor dear tramontanes shall learn a little of the world, if it is only from me. It is barbarous to keep them in darkness.

The dinner bell begins to ring, and I am in my dressing-gown. Let me hear soon how you are. I dare say, by this time, you are quite yourself again. And where is the colonel?—with you? or without you? Farewell.

Your's infinitely,

HELEN STORFORD.

LETTER CXXIV.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

16th November.

AND is there no way by which we can arrive at a knowledge of ourselves, but that of *painful* experience?—must the living human heart be lacerated, before its texture can be defined?

finer? I fear—I feel that this is a condition of our nature. Till the hour in which I suspected an abatement of Mr. Wilnor's affection, I was ignorant that I returned it. A thousand times have I blamed myself for the lukewarmness of my love for him. I have accused myself of insensibility and ingratitude. I have believed, that the motives which induced me to accept him, regarded rather my own happiness than his. I now find my mistake. I was not conscious of any love for him, because nothing had yet occurred to make it press heavily on my heart. Had he been absent, that might have informed me, if it is true that we know not the value of any blessing till it is departing; but a more cruel caustic has awakened me, and I am learning, under the inflictions of jealousy, a passion which, in the pride of self-conceit, I till now thought myself exempt from.

Unless appearances very much deceive me, Mr. Wilnor is no longer insensible to lady Helen's attractions. He seems to look at her and to hear her with pleasure. He does not now smile contemptuously at her unrestrained levity; he listens in complacent silence, and, instead of wishing she would not intrude on our conversations, he urges her to be with us, and occasionally hints that it is dull without her.

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What, but the natural power of lively beauty, can have wrought this change, I know not; and if it is the inherent prerogative of loveliness to monopolize admiration, why should I complain of it? or how can I oppose it? I have the comfort of thinking it is no act of mine that I suffer by; for though the coolness of my temper may have appeared odious, when compared with lady Helen's sprightly warmth, I must have undergone an alteration, equally sudden and strange, to rest the blame on me, since it is but a few days ago, that Mr. Wilnor explicitly told me how much, and why, he preferred my disposition to my friend's.

I could willingly, as indeed it is very necessary to my peace, persuade myself that I injure him and his integrity, by a precipitate and ill-founded suspicion; but every hour is adducing proof to support it. Had I perceived this change immediately on lady Helen's arrival, I should not have thought so seriously of it. I acknowledge her superior beauty;—as much as one unenvying female can be charmed with the attractions of another, lady Helen has charmed me. In looking at her, I have forgotten her trifling character, and as one of the fairest of the Almighty's handyworks, as a proof of the infinite superiority of his divine workmanship,

I have

I have reverentially admired her ; and indeed I should have thought Mr. Wilnor a very deficient being, if he had viewed her with total indifference. But, without any disparagement of lady Helen's powers, I may say, I was persuaded that, when the novelty of her person was over, her fascinations would be much weakened. It is a remark I have heard made by her own friends, and by young men that have admired her, that her beauty is too apparent to be long agreeable.

These considerations, my friendship for her, my confidence in her honour, a natural absence of suspicion, and a wish to introduce her to an agreeable family, made me unhesitatingly promote lady Wilnor's invitation.

The keen sight of particular interest has given me the first notice of this revolution. I cannot suppose lady Helen is acquainted with it. I am sure I should see uneasiness in her countenance, did she even imagine she had injured her friend. To doubt her regard for me would be unjust and absurd ; for she never was more explicit in her professions. She would, I am convinced, have warned me, and proposed removing herself from a place where her integrity might be questioned. But she is still the innocent, simple, volatile creature I ever knew

her. She has a bosom that cannot harbour deceit; she has a nature that would not suffer her to be, in any degree, cruel. Can I suppose that she, who has been my intimate friend from my cradle, whom I never wilfully offended, nor carelessly slighted, could, on any consideration, reduce me to a state in which I must appear contemptible, and feel myself wretched?

These are the fears, the hopes, the suppositions, and suggestions, that a waking night has distressed and flattered me with. As there is a possibility of my erring, I shall suspend any farther judgement, till I have farther proof. The agitation of my mind shall be confided to no one but you. I will observe diligently, determine candidly, and, if it is permitted me, submit patiently.

I am, with a degree of constancy which I shall begin to value myself on, if I find it rare,

Your very affectionate

GERTRUDE.

LETTER

LETTER CXXV.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

Gervaise-priory, 23d November.

MY suspicion is confirmed, and I am in the utmost distress to know how I shall act. Shall I go and tell lady Wilnor, or shall I write to my father? But you do not know what has happened.

After breakfast, this morning, lady Helen said she should employ herself till dinner-time, in writing to her mother. We therefore, supposed her sitting, either in her room, or in one of the parlours; but, having occasion to go to the library, I saw her walking in the garden, and Mr. Wilnor with her, in deep discourse. His right arm was round her waist, and her left hand was on his shoulder. She talked, apparently with great earnestness, and frequently inclining her head, looked full at him, as if to discover his mind in his eyes. They turned short of the house, and I saw no more of them.

Whether it is that my having seen this, has strengthened my imagination, or that Mr. Wilnor's attachment to lady Helen has been made

closer by this interview, I cannot determine; but he has scarcely spoken to me since, though we were together the whole of the evening. O my dear Mrs. Thirpley, tell me what I ought to do. It is impossible I can marry a man whose affections are divided; nor would I, to gain worlds, separate two people who are attached to each other. It is no unpardonable crime in Mr. Wilnor to have changed his inclinations, and with my hearty consent shall he quit me for lady Helen, if it can be done; but neither his father nor mother seem partial to her, and they are evidently so to me. I have too great a regard for Mr. Wilnor, to think with patience, on his being compelled, either by a sense of honour, or by parental authority, to take the woman who has but the second place in his heart; and indeed my own happiness is concerned in preventing it. An alliance with lord Porthurst's family would be so much more honourable than with mine, that, I flatter myself, want of fortune, on the part of lady Helen, would be overlooked. Once more let me request your immediate advice: while I am waiting for it I shall be extremely uneasy. There is scarcely an hour which does not precipitate our wedding;—sir Tancred and lady Wilnor, thinking, I suppose, to gratify their son,

son, are extremely urgent with me to name a day :—a day, I hope, I never shall be forced to name, unless something convinces me, that Bertram, by his own free and unguided choice, takes the hand of

Your almost distracted

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER CXXVI.

MRS. THIRPLEY TO MISS BELVEDERE.

27th November, 1787.

MY DEAR LOVE,

YOUR letter has been but a few minutes in my possession, and perhaps, on such an occasion, I could not give you advice at once prompt and wholesome, if I had not foreseen, from what you before mentioned to me, that you might be brought into your present dilemma. My dearest Gertrude need not be told that I sincerely pity her distress, nor that I applaud her resolution of rather sacrificing her lover to her friend, than putting any restraint on him.

As it is absolutely necessary for you to be fully satisfied of the state of Mr. Wilnor's

mind, and as you wish to screen him from the resentment of his parents, I would, in your place, when alone with him, question him on the subject, without naming lady Helen. I would not, till driven to it, say that any thing beside his sudden coolness, had awakened my suspicion; but I would fairly represent to him, that a marriage of compliance and indifference, must be a marriage of wretchedness. To induce him to be candid, I would justify a change of sentiments, and make the confession as easy as possible. If the young gentleman has either head or heart, this will, I think, obtain for you the information you want.

This, you will say, is but one step. If Mr. Wilnor owns his partiality for lady Helen, you will wish to facilitate their union. Your best method of doing this, will be by desiring Mr. Belvedere to recall you to town. Any excuse will serve that purpose. When there, you must tell him all, and beg him to let you write to the Wilnor family, requesting that your marriage may be postponed for a few months. If your friend and Mr. Wilnor act warily, they may avail themselves of the uneasiness this procrastination will produce: he may affect to feel his pride hurt, and the consequences will be, perhaps, what he wishes. Thus, though the enamoured

enamoured simpletons must surmount some difficulties to get at it, you will have placed happiness, or rather I should say *wedlock*, within their reach. But, above all, my Gertrude, as soon as things are in this train, be sure to write to lady Wilnor a justification of your conduct; for, when you have once done what is necessary to bring this couple together, you are not obliged to risk an ill opinion of yourself, and such friends are not to be forfeited out of mere punctilio.

I sincerely hope that you will find great part of my advice needless. It is possible that Mr. Wilnor may have no serious thoughts of lady Helen, and that he will be more hurt by the supposition, than you are by your jealousy. I rest my hopes on a foundation that secures them. You have never told me he was deficient in common-sense, and, if he is not, I cannot admit an idea of his balancing between my Gertrude and lady Helen Storford.

That these events may turn out so as to promote your happiness, is the sincere wish of her whose peace is interwoven with your's.

I am, my dear love, ever your

ANNE THIRPLEY.

LETTER CXXVII.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

Gervaise. Wednesday-noon.

IF the perturbation of my mind will permit me to hold a pen, I will devote an interval of most agonising suspense to that employment which alone can calm my spirits,—writing to my dearest, my only bosom-friend. Your letter reached me as soon as it could. I have waited for an opportunity to follow your directions, and chance has offered me one. I fear I shall need the whole of your advice, for Mr. Wilnor's conduct must, I think, shortly attract the notice of all the family. I am sure miss Wilnor sees his coolness, and guesses the cause: a little encouragement from me is all she wants to make her speak on the subject; but while I can confine what I suffer, to my own bosom, I will not risk drawing on Bertram such a cloud of indignation as I foresee.

Colonel Branlyffe and his lady, who have been a short time from home, are now returned to Vale Ofier: her ladyship has recovered her health, and is resuming her usual mode of life. An invitation from them to be present at a ball,
obliged

obliged lady Helen to prepare hastily for a temporary absence from us, and Bertram's concern was visible, or rather I may say, it was glaring. I was invited: she pressed me earnestly to go with her, and Mr. Wilnor did not at all oppose it; but I had a too substantial reason for declining it. I saw what an advantage her being absent would afford me, as while she was here, it was next to impossible for me to get an audience of Bertram. Yesterday morning she went; and as her return is not fixed to a day, I resolved to lose no time. Accordingly I chose this morning to execute my project, which was to draw him into the garden, or one of the rooms where we might not be overheard, and there to question him as you advised.

By accident I met him on the stairs, a little before breakfast: he could not decently pass me without speaking, and I easily got him into the nearest room; but my spirits were so hurried, I could not utter a word: he repeatedly asked me what I had to say:—I was unable to tell him—miss Harriet Wilnor came to seek us, and he left me; but I am firmly of opinion he knew my intention. He excused himself, under pretence of the head-ach, from coming to breakfast, and I have not seen him since.

Finding my tongue such a traitor, and lest I should be as ill served by my courage, I have just now written what I would have said:—what I felt while I wrote, may the vilest wretch on earth never feel ! before I seal my billet, I will copy it for you here.

S I R,

THE feelings which kept me silent when I last saw you, forbid me to remain so, and leave me only this means of communicating what my tongue would not then utter. Our relative situation makes any disguise both dangerous and unpardonable : we must be explicit or unhappy.

It is with concern, equal to the grateful regard I entertain for every member of your father's family, that I find myself compelled to perceive I have forfeited your confidence, and that every day still more indubitably indicates some unaccountable change in you :—a change which grieves me, not because it wounds my pride or cuts off my prospect, but because I foresee, that without the utmost circumspection, and perhaps with it, myself and those most dear to me will be made miserable.

Notwithstanding the engagement between us, I can assure you, sir, your actions are entirely
in

in your own power. If, on a re-consideration, you think you have done rashly, you have only to say so ; or if your affections are biased from me, I intreat you to confess it. Think, Mr. Wilnor, what a marriage where repentance precedes the ceremony, must end in ; and believe me, when I say, I could with infinitely more alacrity promote your marriage with any lady you prefer to me, than accept your hand, while the shadow of suspected reluctance hung on my mind.

Let common humanity plead for me in your breast. If you have the least friendship for me, you would not purposely make me wretched, which I must be, unless you candidly acquaint me with the state of your affections. Should they, as I before hinted, have changed their object, depend on me for doing all I can to facilitate your obtaining it. I will leave this place, and make the coolness appear mine. I will do any thing I can to relieve you ; but at the same time I must apprise you, I will never tacitly submit to contempt I have not deserved. The good opinion of my friends I consider as one of my dearest possessions, and to shew that I have done nothing reprehensible, is a duty I owe to society. Be therefore explicit, and you shall find me so : trust me with your confidence,

dence, and I will not betray it—I am hurt at being forced to conclude with a threat; but as I believe your indisposition to be feigned for the purpose of avoiding me, if your silence continues through the day, I must disclose the uneasiness of my mind to those who I need not tell you, will resent it for

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

Such is my letter,—far from what I wished it to be;—I am now going to convey it.

I have slipped my letter under the door of Mr. Wilnor's reading-room; he is there, and therefore must see it. How he will answer it, whether by the same mode of conveyance, or by a visit, I am at a loss to guess. I hope in whatever way he does it, he will do it quickly and briefly, for I am quite harrassed by my uneasiness, and of all things in the world abhor altercation. I hear somebody coming—It was little Margaret with a request from her mama to see me in the breakfast parlor. What can lady Wilnor want? she eyed me very intently this morning—I fear she has some suspicion—Perhaps she may account for Bertram's conduct—Courage befriend me—I go.

Wednesday.

Wednesday-night.

The trying scene is over, and I must, before I think of sleep, relate to my dear adviser what has passed since I broke off.—I went down, and found lady Wilnor waiting for me, and alone. I saw something like vexation in her countenance, which she endeavoured to veil with a smile, and I began to quake.—She prevented my asking to know her pleasure, by telling me her mind was not at ease, and that she had intruded on my privacy, in hopes of obtaining satisfaction on a very important point. She had got no farther, when her son opened the door, not aware of her being there. I saw my letter, unfolded, in his hand: he withdrew when he perceived us in conversation, and presently sent by little Margaret a slip of paper, on which was written —

You are incapable of revenge. My dear Gertrude, forgive and do not betray my indiscretion, and be assured I can prove myself still wholly your

B. W.

What was I now to do with lady Wilnor?—she had paused while I read the note, and whether to desire her to proceed, or to shew it her, or to run away, I could not resolve. She, fortunately for me, of herself resumed the discourse,

course, which had not yet entrusted me with her drift, as it contained only exhortations to be unreserved, and professions of attachment to me. She now told me frankly, that she had of late perceived a coldness between Bertram and me, and called upon me to account for it, encouraging me by saying, that if he had given me any just cause of offence, I should find that, as his mother, she was no more partial to him, than, as a friend, she was interested for me.

Had it not been for the prohibition in my hand, which her ladyship's good breeding had not suffered her to enquire about, I had now told her all, instead of which I replied only that there had been a little misunderstanding between Mr. Wilnor and myself, but which the note I had just received, fully cleared up. As it was unintelligible to all who had not a clue to it, I shewed it to her: she read it, observed to me that differences such as these, were best made up by the parties without mediation, and very tenderly expressing her love for me, left the room.

I was scarcely conscious I was alone, when humbled Bertram entered. My letter seemed to have electrified him, and he did so accuse himself, and execrate the folly that had made his dear Gertrude wretched and angry, that, I

was

was forced, out of mere pity, repeatedly to assure him of my forgiveness. He had instantly discovered who I meant by hinting at *another object of his affections*, and with a degree of candor that I could not but applaud, he owned that lady Helen's beauty and vivacity had charmed him, and too much engaged his attention. He took the utmost pains to convince me that these attractions had made no deep impression on his mind: he said their novelty had perhaps diverted his thoughts from me occasionally for a few minutes; but that I did him as great injustice as he could possibly have been guilty of, if I imagined lady Helen could be a formidable rival to me, for he might say on his honor, he never left her company and conversation without making a comparison that was of necessity in my favour, and without being convinced in his reason that he must be much happier with me than with any other woman;—but, added he, you do not know the power your sex have over us—we despise their blandishments, their arts, their decorations, and all their witchery, in the ignorance of theory; but bring forward to the view of one of us visionaries, such a woman as your friend, with all her embellishments and deceptions, and I will be
hanged,

hanged, supposing the man to have any soul; if he does not bow at the altar he has villified?

This reconciliation is, like all reconciliations under the same circumstances, to occasion precipitancy and a bustle. Lady Helen has my promise to remain as I am, till her return; and her motions are not so regular as to be safely depended on. If she comes back in time, and if my father can be here then, so early a day as next Tuesday stamps my fate. Every body about me is quite elated; they will flatter me into a notion that I am the sovereign arbiter of their felicity or infelicity:—be it as it will, the state of my spirits is not above calm content, and I believe, after all, that is the safest point to remain at.

Adieu, my dearest madam:—believe I esteem the advice I have so successfully followed as an additional favor conferred on

Your most obliged and faithful

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER CXXVIII.

MISS BELVEDERE TO LADY HELEN STOR-
FORD.

Thursday. Morn.

MY DEAR LADY HELEN,

MR. Wilnor has made me name next Tuesday; but we postpone writing to my father, till we know how it will suit you.

I am very unwilling to deprive your friends of the pleasure of your company; but as I do not think I can prevail on my impatient gentleman to wait any longer, I must request you, either to absolve me from my promise, or to engage to return before the day appointed. You cannot need to be told which I should prefer, and, in confidence of your disposition to do whatever can give me pleasure, I shall expect you here on Monday evening, at farthest, unless you previously forbid my hopes. I must not say a word of the honour your absence would deprive me of; but I may truly assure you, that without you, the day will be a day of imperfect joy to

Your faithful

G. BELVEDERE.

LETTER

LETTER CXXIX.

LADY HELEN STORFORD TO MISS BEL-
VEDERE.

Friday afternoon.

I CAN neither absolve you, my dear Bel, from your promise, nor be with you at the time you have fixed on to reward the constancy of your swain. I forbid the banns till I come, which cannot be before to-morrow se'enight, for lady Lucy and I are engaged for every hour till then, and, on Friday evening, half the county is to be here, to see us play *The Heiress*, and *The First Floor*. I play miss Allscrip and Nancy—Branlyffe, lord Gayville, and young Whimsy—lady Lucy takes lady Emily and miss Whimsy. We are in great want of a good miss Alton—I wish you could be here; for your countenance and manner just suit the character. I speak a prologue of my own writing. We are as busy as possible, getting by heart, rehearsing, and contriving our dresses. The stage is nearly ready, and the scenes are to come from town. But to return to your wedding, which I had almost forgot. I shall send this by a servant of Branlyffe's,

lyffe's, who is going on an errand, within ten miles of you, and I shall charge him with a note to your husband elect, praying his patience, which, that you may not intercept it, I shall order to be given into Bertram's own hand. You see how careful I am.

Adieu. Every moment is so occupied, that I have only time to say, I am my dearest Belvedera's

HELEN STORFORD.

LETTER CXXX.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

Monday.

THIS important business is delayed, and I am still Gertrude Belvedere. Lady Helen is detained at Vale Ofier, and, without extreme disrespect and indecent precipitation, we cannot resist her injunction to stay for her. On Saturday she is to be with us, and the Monday following is to be the day. Mr. Wilnor was out when her ladyship's letter came. As soon as he returned, I shewed it him, and told him, as she had informed me in it, that a servant of
colonel

colonel Branlyffe's waited to give him a note from her to strengthen her request that we would wait. The particular engagement that detains her, is a scheme of the gay folks at the Vale, to perform a comedy and farce on Friday evening. Bertram was provoked at the excuse, and vowed no trumpery plays should thwart him. In his pettish anger, he inadvertently dropped this expression—lady Helen has done me mischief enough with her coquettish arts, and nearly made me her dupe;—she is entitled to no respect from me. But when he returned from the messenger, he was cooled, and disposed to submit, though his countenance was far from serene, and I perceived in him still a degree of agitation that, I believe, arose from his disappointment. I had some curiosity to see the talisman that had operated on his impatience; but to have requested such a thing, would have argued suspicion, and I soon after saw him throw it into the fire.

I know lady Wilnor thinks lady Helen's injunction very inconsistent with good-breeding. Sir Tancred fumes at the folly of such a *puppet-show*, as he calls the intended dramatic exhibition, and no one is pleased or satisfied; but I might offend my father, if I were wanting in respect

respect to his friend's daughter, and this consideration makes the family here, for my sake, silent on the subject.

I fear the revenge I took on Mr. Wilnor was rather too severe : his spirits are not good, and he is often so *distract*, that we play at cross-purposes in conversing with him. Should this continue after next Monday, I shall think it out of my power to cure it. You shall hear of me as soon as we are settled in town. Let me have your thoughts and good wishes, and be to Gertrude Wilnor the same warm friend you have ever since the commencement of our acquaintance, shewn yourself to her whom nothing shall detach from you.

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER

LETTER CXXXI.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

Saturday.

I AM so overpowered with wonder and astonishment, that I know not where or how to begin to tell you what has happened. Bertram Wilnor has gone off with lady Helen!

On Wednesday evening, to our no small surprise, lady Helen returned from Vale Osier, as a reason for which sudden coming, she told us, that the death of lady Lucy's brother had blown up their comedy-scheme; and, as the family could not, for some days, appear in public company, it had relieved her from her engagements. We were glad to see her again; but as every thing was fixed for Tuesday, the arrangement was suffered to stand unaltered.

Nothing remarkable occurred in the next day, excepting that Mr. Wilnor was from home, for the purpose, as he said, of taking leave of some of his friends in the neighbourhood. Soon after eleven at night, lady Helen and I went up to our chambers together, and she staid gossiping with me till near twelve, when we parted. About two in the morning,

I thought

I thought I heard a noise in her room, which joined mine. I called to her, but having no answer, I rose, opened her door, and saw her maid standing at her bed-side, with a candle in her hand. I enquired what was the matter, and was told, that lady Helen had been ill, but was now better, and going to sleep. Fearful of disturbing her, I retired, and went to bed again, still listening to every motion in her room, till hearing, as I thought, her servant leave her, I concluded she was asleep, and betook myself to my repose. In the morning, as soon as I was up, I attempted to open her door gently, to learn, if she were awake, how she had rested; but finding the door locked, I supposed her maid had fastened it that she might be quiet, and I went down. When the chapel-bell rang, I excused her absence, and we were going in, when Mr. Wilnor was missed. One of the little girls was sent to his chamber. She brought back word he was not there, nor in his sitting-room. Enquiry was now made in the lower part of the house for him, and till now we might have hunted, if we had not heard a whisper amongst the servants, that the paddock-gate had been found open, early in the morning.

This, which in a less regular family would have been disregarded, was here a very extraordinary absence, and sir Tancred was prodigiously disturbed at it; but, in a few minutes, he recovered himself, ordered the service to proceed, and all farther enquiry to be postponed. As soon as it was over, he called up such of the servants as he supposed could inform him; but to no purpose. The carriages and horses had not been employed, and we could only guess, that he had strolled out, without his watch, and missed the time. This was far from a satisfactory conclusion; for the weather was not at all tempting. Breakfast was ordered. Lady Wilnor desired that lady Helen's maid might enquire whether her lady chose to come down, or to have her breakfast above. The maid was not to be found, nor had any body seen her. I said she must be with lady Helen, and went up myself. The door from my chamber was still locked; I then rapped at that which led to the stairs. No answer being made, I opened it, and found neither mistress nor servant there. With scarcely the power of recollection, I asked myself if I had not dreamed of her return; but a bit of paper on the table awakened my faculties, and promised to explain the mystery.

tery. I snatched it up, and these lines were its contents :—

Pursuit is vain, for, e'er to-morrow's light,
We shall be join'd in Hymen's sacred rite.
No vulgar Gretna-green unites our hands;
Our Cupid leads us into foreign lands.
Anger may rage, Simplicity may mourn,
Till pardon's offer'd, we shall not return.

B. W.

H. S.

Though this paper was in the hand-writing of lady Helen only, the signed initials were a full explanation of all that had puzzled us. It put a stop to all query as to the absence of the parties; but what were my feelings, when I reflected, that on me devolved the task of bearing the disgraceful tidings to the family? To conceal the saucy defiance, was my first resolve; yet how then could I prove that Bertram and lady Helen were gone together? The necessity of acting, and the impossibility of determining how to act, confounded me, and the shock my intellects had received, overpowered me. I sunk down on a chair, with the paper in my hand, and knew nothing that passed, till I heard Margaret Wilnor crying vehemently. I opened my eyes, roused, I suppose, by her

M 2

noise.

noise. She was standing at the door, calling out—*Pray dear somebody, come—O mama, O sister, O nurse, do come—Miss Beldedee is dead, and I can't make her speak.*—The poor dear creature had screamed herself hoarse, and her tears almost choaked her. Her distress recalled my spirits completely. I spoke to her, and she instantly sprang to me, half stifling me with her joyful kisses.

By this time lady Wilnor was alarmed, and, with her eldest daughter, came to me. A fit of crying relieved me; but I could no otherwise explain the discovery I had made, than by shewing the paper. Her ladyship took it, and, apparently aghast with surprise, quitted the room, and left miss Wilnor to take care of me.

As soon as I was able to walk, we went down to the breakfast-parlour, where some were crying, others staring at each other for information, and sir Tancred pacing backwards and forwards in great commotion. Not a word was uttered during the meal, beyond the civilities or requests of a tea-table. Immediately as it was concluded, sir Tancred bid the young people, excepting miss Wilnor, leave the room; and he then, in a manner that at once commanded

manded reverence, credit, and pity, expressed his sorrow for the folly, and baseness, and duplicity of his son; disclaimed all knowledge or suspicion of his intentions, and lamented that he should have lived to see the character of his family so injured. O, my dear Mrs. Thirpley, how wretched did I feel when I considered that I, though innocently, had been the cause of such affliction to this worthy man, who took my hand, with all the emotion of tenderness, and carrying it to his trembling lips, intreated me to believe, that Bertram's conduct, stabbing as it was, would not have wounded him so deeply, had any but myself been the woman he deserted.

I was extremely affected by his kindness; but to offer him a word of comfort was not in my power. The weakness and hypocrisy of Mr. Wilnor, and the artful treachery of lady Helen, who certainly obliged us to wait for her, and returned hither, solely for the purpose of supplanting me in his heart, had excited my resentment; and to reflect on my having so implicitly confided in two persons so unworthy of all confidence, was racking. It was cruel in Bertram to engage my heart, and then to discard it. It was unpardonable barbarity in lady Helen, to strike at the peace of her who

M 3

would,

would, with joy, have sacrificed, for her sake, not only her lover, but her love. But,

—What is friendship but a name,
A charm that lulls to sleep?

It was indeed a charm that lulled me to sleep; for had all the world joined in accusing lady Helen, I would have borne my testimony against them. Such an angel's face! such a frank and undisguised deportment!—O who can I ever again trust? The worst, the vilest people regard the compact of friendship as sacred. The midnight robber respects the property of his accomplice;—even life and pardon are often refused, when on the condition of betraying a friend;—and shall a woman, a tender susceptible woman, be deaf to this common voice? Shall the daughter of a peer behave dishonourably?—but my head rambles.

As soon as we could sufficiently collect ourselves to think what ought to be done, sir Tancred proposed sending an express to my father to break the matter to him. This is agreed on, and the man sets out before noon to-day. Sir Tancred writes—I cannot.

The catastrophe has fully explained the previous part of Bertram and lady Helen's conduct. She certainly, and evidently, laid a trap
for

for him, and he was caught in it. Her absence, and my remonstrance, in some measure recovered him, and this, I suppose, she perceived by my urging her return. It was then her policy to gain time: the note she sent him, tho' I never saw it, I am sure, contained something that staggered him. This attack she followed by her sudden coming hither; and he, probably fearing another conflict, and wavering between passion and honour, proposed, or consented to the rash step they have taken. But, in the name of common sense, why might not all this have been effected openly? He knew I would have renounced him. If what he did was right, why was he ashamed of it?—if it was wrong, why did he do it?

I have written till I am quite weary. Every body here is kinder than ever to me; but I do not know what will become of me, nor where I shall be. This will, for the present, deprive me of the hope of hearing from you. When any thing is determined on, you shall know it from

Your

G. BELVEDERE.

LETTER CXXXII.

SIR TANCRED WILNOR TO MR. BELVEDERE.

Gervaise-priory. Saturday.

DEAR SIR,
FOR the first time in my life, I feel that sort of shame which is consequent on guilt. I am really ashamed to see you:—and with almost equal reluctance I sit down to tell you of an event that distresses us beyond measure. Yet that you should be apprised of it, and that I should apprise you of it, is due to you, and incumbent on me.

It is not for myself I blush; but it is for one so connected with myself, that I feel criminal, and so disgraced, that I question if even your candid judgment and acquittal will reconcile me to myself. The sins of the fathers are visited on the children, and the seeming inequality is regulated, in the opinion of the world, by making the parents responsible for the errors of their offspring; but, in this instance, I am punished for what I had no hand in. My hopes are all blasted; the character of my family, which, till now, stood as high as any in the kingdom, is impeached,

and your amiable daughter is rendered unhappy, by the folly, the duplicity, and the cunning of my son and lady Helen Storford, who, very early yesterday morning, set off together, for the purpose of a clandestine marriage in a foreign country.

I am as unable to account for this almost unparalleled folly, as to justify it. You, as a father, and particularly as the father of miss Belvedere, can judge of my grief and disappointment. Her amiable temper has been severely tried; but she has behaved in a manner that must, more than ever, endear her to her friends. She is at a loss how to act, till she hears whether you will come hither to take her away, or suffer us still to have the charge of her. I cannot urge her to stay with us, for she can have little faith in the name of Wilnor; yet neither my wife, my girls, nor myself, can think of parting from her. Our wishes, however, my dear sir, shall be guided by your's. I am sensible that we deserve no consideration from you, nor dare I hope you will continue to think me

Your sincere friend,

I and very humble servant,

TANCRED WILNOR.

LETTER CXXXIII.

MR. BELVEDERE TO MISS BELVEDERE.

Berkley-square. Saturday.

DEAR GERTRUDE,

BE ready to leave the house you have been so insulted in, on Friday, when I will fetch you. I shall not come to the Priory, but will wait for you at the nearest inn. You shall know when I am arrived, and the post-chaise shall be sent to bring you to me. Will any body make me believe, that such a scheme could have been carried on without connivance? I suppose your friends foresaw how it would end, when lady Helen was invited; for, I am certain that, if more than Mr. Wilnor's interest with her had not been exerted, she, who was ever so much attached to you, would not have been guilty of such baseness. Pride, or avarice, or sometimes both, my dear girl, you will see rule half the world. Sir Tancred's avarice might have been gratified in his son's marrying you; but his pride is still dearer to him, and an earl's daughter is still a better match. I know he piques himself highly on his family, and however angry he may affect to be, believe me, he

is

is not displeased. All his canting, for he has written me a fine canting letter, will not impose on me. I hope you have spirit enough to resent, as you ought, the affront put on you. I shall not write to any of the family, nor do I care who sees this.

Yours affectionate father,
FRANCIS BELVEDERE.

LETTER CXXXIV.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MRS. THIRPLEY.

Monday.

MY situation grows every day worse. Sir Tancred wrote to my father, and I have received the answer, dictated by the first impulse of anger and disappointment. I was with the family when it arrived, and my confusion at the violence of its contents was too great for me to conceal it. From its being addressed to me, rather than to him, sir Tancred guessed its tenor. He requested to see it; I could not refuse, and now I can scarcely tell whether he or my father is most enraged. They both have reason to be angry; but I must, in justice, say,

M 6 that

that my father has no reason to be angry with sir Tancred, and surely a quarrel can do no good. Another express goes to town this afternoon. Sir Tancred writes, and so will I. All my wish now is to heal the breach.

This place, once the seat of peace and bliss, is changed to a melancholy habitation. No abatement indeed is made in the kindness I have been uniformly treated with. I have begged that, as I cannot, with propriety, avow my sentiments, no mention may be made of what is passed.

No news of Bertram or lady Helen. I leave the Priory on Friday. My father fetches me, but says he will not come to the house. This rupture, with people so good to me, is more heart-breaking than the accident that occasions it. Half the pleasure I had in view, was founded on my love for these worthy friends, and now to be separated from them—to be denied all communication, when I have known them just long enough to esteem them highly, is a torturing necessity.

The sorrow I too visibly excite, keeps me perpetually unhappy. Miss Wilnor has cried, I believe incessantly, since my father's letter came. The dear girls have all been so busy in preparing a variety of presents for me—and all is now

at a stand. Our sitting room is filled with signs of their defeated intentions, which yet no one cares to remove. Even little Margaret is grieved at hearing I must go. She hangs round me, and begs me to stay; for, may be, Bertram may come back. I tell her—No—Bertram has got another wife.—But she is not my sister, returns Margaret: I will never call her sister.

I must break off, to begin my letter to my father. O I wish you were here to dictate it. May the genius of peace and charity inspire me! For many reasons, I wish I may succeed—if I do not, sir Tancred will remain very unjustly suspected of being not so much displeased as he appears at this abominable elopement.

If you do not hear from me on Friday, conclude I am in Berkley-square, and let me have the pleasure of a letter from you. Whatever caprices fortune may invent to harrafs me, I hope she will leave me your friendship, without which, I should be infinitely more than I am,

Your distressed

GERTRUDE.

LETTER

LETTER CXXXV.

SIR TANCRED WILNOR TO MR. BEL-
VEDERE.

Gervaise-priory. Monday.

SIR,

I WHO, when I last addressed you, considered myself as in some measure a delinquent, am, by the style of a reply which you disdained to address to me, converted into the injured party. Much as I can allow for the ebullition of anger, I cannot extenuate or excuse the malignant and ill-founded charge you have been pleased to bring against me; your rejecting my apology for the evil of which I was innocent; and your asserting, in direct terms, that you suspect connivance.

Be it known to you, sir, that my honour is as dear to me, as your credit is necessary to you; and that I hold it as much my duty, as it is your interest, to preserve a character, not only unblemished, but illustrious. As to your charge of avarice, I deny it: a large family obliged me, early in life, to be an œconomist; and it is by œconomy alone, that I have been enabled to provide for them. To your accusation of

pride,

pride, I will partially plead guilty, and own, that I am perhaps over-scrupulously nice, lest, by any fault of mine, I should bring discredit on my name; but I am not one of those family-proud people, who think a long or a noble ancestry reflects real honour on themselves: my actions I am to be tried by, not my tree of descent. In one sense, I do indeed pique myself on my pedigree. Tradition assures me, that no one of those I am descended from, was ever known to have done a dishonest, a dishonourable,¹ or an ungenerous act. This fair fame, un sullied as it was bequeathed to me, I intend to leave my children, as a patrimony infinitely more valuable than all my other possessions. That he who should have transmitted it down to posterity, has proved himself unworthy of the charge, is a subject of deep affliction to me; but, till I saw your injurious reply to a letter which, at least, demanded candour, I was not properly aware of the weight of the misfortune. And was it not grief enough, to find the labour of so many years thrown away, without the addition of feeling, that the stab which reached my peace had wounded my character?

With one who can so scandalously distrust and impeach me, I scorn to expostulate. The
care

care I took to soften the disagreeable communications of my former letter, you affect to call *canting*. I shall say no more in vindication of myself; if I cannot convince, I will not persuade. Those who know me, will believe me when I say, on my honour, I knew nothing of my son's intention.

For what you have thought proper to advance falsely, I expect reasonable satisfaction. Retract it; own yourself wrong, and I will pardon it. If you do not chuse this, as mutual confidence is indispensibly necessary to mutual trust, I must, though unwillingly, desire that nothing may hinder your removing your much to be pitied daughter, and that you will be prepared to close the account between us, and to pay over the money I have in your hands, at the end of the current year.

I am, sir,
your humble servant

TANCRED WILNOR.

LETTER CXXXVI.

MISS BELVEDERE TO MR. BELVEDERE.

Monday-morning.

O MY father, my honored, my dear father, you cannot tell how I am shocked to find you suspect sir Tancred's integrity :—indeed you would not, if you were here ; he is as much hurt at Mr. Wilnor's conduct as you can be. Let me intreat you to entertain no doubt that can injure one who has been so very kind to me.

I will, as you direct, be ready to leave this place on Friday ; but if you love me, permit me to leave it, as I have ever found it, in peace. Let me see you here I beseech you, and let me have the satisfaction of hearing the matter amicably settled. Sir Tancred writes by this conveyance, but I know nothing of what he purposes to say. I can only hope his letter will remove all your suspicions, for I am certain he is as innocent as myself about Mr. Wilnor's going off with lady Helen ; nay, he may be more ignorant, for I have suspected their attachment some time.

I in-

I intended to have said much more ; but my tears will not let me proceed: Again I conjure you to think favourably of sir Tancred, and am

Your very obedient daughter,

GERTRUDE BELVEDERE.

LETTER CXXXVII.

MR. BELVEDERE TO LORD PORTHURST.

London.

MY DEAR LORD,

LITTLE did I foresee that I ever could have reason to complain of a breach of friendship in any of your family. In you it is impossible; in lady Porthurst it is impossible;—but not so in your daughter, whose various attractions and recommendations, aided by other circumstances, and I believe other counsels, have done me almost the greatest injury I can survive. She has at one stroke demolished all the plan I had concerted and nearly executed; she was invited to stay with Gertrude in Sussex; she

she has warped Bertram Wilnor's affections to herself;—she has eloped with him, and, it is to be hoped, is by this time his wife.

Forgive the rude manner in which I give you this information. I flatter myself you may already have heard it: do not be unhappy about it: it may not be a bad match for her; for as I am of opinion sir Tancred and his family feign anger at this honorable connexion, he probably, when he thinks he can throw aside the mask safely, will be liberal to his son. At present he pretends to be profoundly ignorant and highly exasperated:—of the sincerity of the former I can judge from its being lady Wilnor's scheme to invite your daughter, under pretence of detaining mine, and as to the latter, is it likely such a man, even taking him with all his good qualities, would think himself much disgraced by his son's running away with the only daughter of such a family as yours?—It was undoubtedly their design to procure the best wife they could for young Wilnor, who I suppose was wholly under their command: my girl had a prospect of riches, and they thought she might do very well, till your lady Helen came in their way, and she was, beyond comparison, a more tempting match.

I lay

I lay very little to the charge of your lass, because I dare say the young man was tutored to importune her: she probably might, as all pretty women will, endeavour to set off her beauty to the best advantage amongst strangers, and she might like Bertram, and seeing that her friend was deceived in believing his passion real, she might, without any great breach of morality, listen to him and be guided by him and his double-faced relations. With sir Tancred and lady Wilnor I rest the blame: they made their son the tool, and my daughter the dupe.

Gertrude is yet at the Priory: I shall fetch her thence the day after to-morrow. I would have instantly recalled her, but I had, in the height of my joy, invited Melros to spend a few days here, imagining I should leave town last Monday to be present at Gertrude's marriage, which was fixed for yesterday. Melros is in London but for a short time, no longer than till Friday, and to save him the trouble of settling himself elsewhere, I told him my being from home could make no difference to him, and that he might as well abide here during his stay in town. I would not for the world he and miss Belvedere should cross one another now, so she must remain where she is till he goes.

goes. I could not conceal from him the ill success of his negotiation, and he feels it as any man of honor under such circumstances, would do. I do not think your daughter's husband would be safe in the same place with him.

My simple girl takes all in good part, and believes firmly in the innocence of those I most strongly suspect—'tis the consummation of art to hide itself.—I have very frankly told her my opinion, and it has reached sir Tancred, who in revenge withdraws his credit:—this is a little unlucky, because his demand is large, and must be discharged at a disadvantage. The Dutch troubles keep us a little in trepidation; but the money shall at any rate be paid, and the difficulty concealed.

This untoward accident has entirely thrown me back in the progress I was making towards peace of mind:—my health is not in its best state, and can ill sustain an oppressed heart. If any thing happens to me, you will think of my girl. She has intreated me to see sir Tancred, and merely to avoid adding to her vexations, I shall indulge her. Let me hear how you and lady Porthurst fare, and when you have news of your daughter.—Do not be angry at it, it is irrevocable, and perhaps it may be the most judicious

ditions step you can take, to be lenient to their fault.

I am, with due respect for you and your countess,

Your lordship's faithful and obedient,

FRANCIS BELYEDERE.

END OF VOL. II.

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